



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

OCT 19 2009

The Honorable Doc Hastings  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1203 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Hastings:

Thank you for your letter of August 17, 2009, in which you raise questions about how the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding is being spent, how projects are being selected, and how many jobs are being created by the Forest Service.

ARRA provides \$1.15 billion for conservation work on all the Nation's forests, with a focus on providing and retaining jobs. The Forest Service organized a process to develop and prioritize projects for funding under ARRA and issued national direction on February 11, 2009, requesting its field offices to submit proposed projects for ARRA funding. The Forest Service's Washington Office Executive Leadership Team prioritized potential projects submitted by the field offices through the regional offices and recommended a final list for my approval. In addition, all project selections were reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of the Vice President prior to release.

Paramount to our selection process is stimulating economic recovery. Forest Service field offices submitted more than 2,700 projects for consideration for ARRA funding. Projects were selected based upon the following criteria:

- Meet the requirements of ARRA,
- Create or retain jobs in the areas of most economic distress, and
- Result in resource benefits by addressing fire potential and insect and disease issues and/or reduce future operation and maintenance costs.

The overriding objective of the Forest Service's implementation of ARRA is to provide jobs in the most economically distressed areas. We made sure to first get money to States most in need. The secondary objective is to accomplish resource benefits by carrying out priority work that will reduce future operation and maintenance costs and wildfire risks. These criteria are applied consistently across all States to guide the selection from among the many deserving projects in areas suffering economic distress.

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The process for prioritizing and funding projects differs depending on whether the project work is to be located on State and private lands or National Forest System lands. For State and private lands, State forestry agencies have evaluated and prioritized projects and submitted potential programs of work to the Forest Service. While the Forest Service will distribute \$250 million to the States under ARRA, State forestry agencies will ultimately decide on which projects to fund under their programs of work.

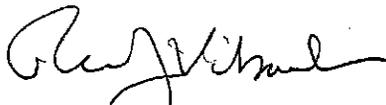
As far as funding disbursed in the States mentioned in your letter, \$2.3 million in Capital Improvement and Maintenance funds were allocated for deferred maintenance work on a Forest Service research facility in Connecticut. Delaware received \$449,000, Massachusetts received \$2.5 million, and Rhode Island received \$673,000 in non-Federal Wildland Fire Management funds for hazardous fuels reduction work on State and private land in each State, again because these programs of work ranked highest using the aforementioned scoring criteria.

I concur with you that there is an immense fire threat faced by communities and States in the West. In May, we disbursed \$223.6 million for Federal and non-Federal projects funded by ARRA to conduct critical hazardous fuels reduction work and over \$38 million to manage invasive species across the country. Much of that funding went to projects in States across the West.

On September 9, 2009, the last of the \$1.15 billion in ARRA funding received by the Forest Service was released. The Agency obligated \$339,092,106 through September 30, 2009, and we estimate that 20,000 jobs will be created. Our projects are already putting people to work and are making a positive impact on communities and the land. Actual jobs created will be identified through recipient reporting which is scheduled to begin during October 2009. A list of approved projects is available on the Forest Service Web site [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us).

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary