



# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

November 4, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your October 19<sup>th</sup> response to my letter regarding Forest Service American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding expenditures, project selection and job creation.

While I appreciate your response, several of my questions remain unanswered regarding the selection process, specific use of taxpayer dollars, the effectiveness of the ARRA and participants in the process.

Additionally, I have some follow-up questions that were prompted by your reply as well as by issues recently raised in the press. Since Recovery.gov promises that "*taxpayer dollars spent under the Recovery Act will be subject to unprecedented transparency and accountability,*" I hope that you will provide more informative and specific answers to the following questions:

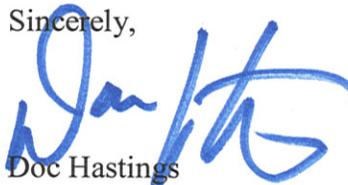
1. In my August 17<sup>th</sup> letter, I asked for a list of all stimulus projects that were considered or proposed. In your response, you note that field offices submitted 2,700 projects for consideration. Please provide me with the complete list of proposed projects.
2. Please explain with specificity how the funding projects for Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, and the District of Columbia (all which contain no National Forest lands) ranked higher than projects in states with National Forests. For example, under the criteria of "*addressing fire potential and insect and disease issues,*" why did programs in these five areas rank higher than competing programs in other parts of the country? Please provide a copy of the proposal documents submitted for the projects awarded in each of these four states and the District of Columbia.

3. You state that the Agency estimates “20,000 jobs will be created” through ARRA expenditures. Several months ago Chief Tom Tidwell stated, in a statement that is still on the Forest Service’s website, that “...we expect to create almost **20,000 new private sector jobs** over the next two years.” Is the Forest Service changing its claim? Will the 20,000 jobs you stated would be created in your letter be “new, private sector” jobs, or will this number also include “saved” jobs or new government jobs? If the number now includes government jobs, how many such jobs will be created and where will these jobs be located?
4. You also state “*actual jobs created will be identified through recipient reporting which is scheduled to begin during October of 2009.*” Is this a government wide practice? Do you track job creation during project implementation or only as a follow-up? Some projects have been completed since March, if a recipient or a subcontractor of the recipient is no longer in business, how do you keep track of jobs created? What form of review or verification will be undertaken on these self-reported job creation figures?
5. Did any private individuals or groups review the list of proposed stimulus projects or participate in the selection of which projects were to be selected? If so, please provide me with a list of the individuals or groups that participated in the process.
6. You stated that project selections were reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of the Vice President. Were these reviews conducted during the selection process or were these offices presented with the list of selected projects for review? What modifications, if any, to the list resulted from their review?

With a \$1.4 trillion deficit and an almost 10 percent unemployment rate, it is more important than ever that we spend taxpayer dollars wisely and work to help the private sector create lasting employment opportunities for people across our country.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Doc Hastings  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources