

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 12, 2013

COMMITTEES:  
HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

BUDGET

SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON AGING

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Director Sylvia Burwell  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Burwell, Secretary Vilsack, and Secretary Jewell:

As you prepare the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 budget request, I urge you to include a new budget plan to solve the chronic problem of the Departments of Agriculture and Interior taking funding intended for forest management and fire prevention activities and instead using it for wildfire suppression. In Wisconsin and across the country, this leaves the U.S. Forest Service without resources to complete its critical missions related to timber contract management, forest health, and forest fire prevention.

Wisconsin's forest products industry has a long and proud tradition of delivering high quality timber and pulp to the state's lumber yards and paper mills. Because our national forest lands make up a large portion of our working forests, low cut rates have a substantial impact on our industry. When cut rates slow and contracts are held up, the entire Northern region of the state feels the impacts, from logging crews to the wood products industry, to local businesses and schools that are hurt by the slowdown. Slow cut rates have also led to decreases in wood quality once loggers are able to harvest timber.

The challenges that Wisconsin's forest products industry faces are exacerbated by federal fire program budget shortfalls. In six of the last ten years, Forest Service funds available to Wisconsin forests have been diverted through the practice of fire borrowing and reallocated to fight wildfires. As a result, Wisconsin forest management has suffered, and an industry already stretched thin must deal with further delays to complete contracts. The diversion also hurts critical research conducted at the Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory, which is developing innovative uses for the type of wood that often fuels our fiercest wildfires, so that it can be put to productive economic use.

The Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Act was enacted in 2009 to mitigate these rising fire costs. The FLAME Act would provide additional suppression funding for emergency wildfire costs that surpass the 10-year average annual suppression expenditures. Unfortunately, the way the FLAME Act is currently implemented, the emergency

account is funded as a part of, and not in addition to, the 10-year average cost of suppression. The FLAME Act should be fully funded separately from the 10-year rolling average used to calculate annual fire suppression in order to allow the agency to meet its obligations to the public in a predictable and prompt manner.

It is urgent that we address these critical budgetary issues. When cut rates slow and contracts are held up, Northern Wisconsin feels the pinch as the impacts cascade from logging crews to local businesses. The Forest Service must have a stable and sufficient budget to allow the agency to be an effective partner for Wisconsin industry, and to meet the federal government's long-standing obligations to our forest communities. I look forward to receiving your reply on this crucial issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tammy" and last name "Baldwin" clearly distinguishable.

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator