

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 621-5390
(530) 622-3645 Fax



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June 23, 2015

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
United States House of Representatives
130 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: SUPPORT HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL 2647 (WESTERMAN)

Dear Congressman Westerman,

On behalf of El Dorado County, I am pleased to report that our board has decided to support H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015. If enacted, this legislation will enhance management practices on our national forest lands, and give the US Forest Service (USFS) the tools it needs to better protect lands from wildfire, disease and infestation.

First, this bill will grant categorical exclusions for 5,000 acre forest management projects. This number increases to 15,000 acres for collaborative projects. Categorical exclusions (CEs) play an important role in ensuring that land management objectives are met. CEs do not exempt forest management projects from rigorous environmental analysis, but instead expedite the decision-making process. USFS officials have described a decision-making process stymied by "paralysis of analysis". H.R. 2647 will help to ease this burden, and get foresters doing what they do best: managing our forests, instead of constantly responding to threats of lawsuits.

Another provision related to forest health requires USFS to reforest at least 75% of a burned area within five years. It also ensures that reforestation activities will undergo an expedited environmental assessment of three months. Reforestation is just as critical as wildfire suppression. By reforesting an area within a timely manner, our national forests can return to a healthy, vibrant state. This is good for the environment, wildlife, and public access.

Finally, H.R. 2647 requires interest groups threatening to sue to post a bond before their lawsuits can move forward. Many management plans find themselves tied up in litigation, leading to unnecessary delays or even the abandonment of projects designed to protect the forests from wildfire or other disasters. If a group wants to sue, they must realize that frivolous lawsuits have consequences, including financial ones. If they win, H.R. 2647 ensures they get their money back. If they lose, they pay the taxpayers' legal fees. This is good for the taxpayers and good for the forests.

I would like to thank you for sponsoring this much needed legislation. I hope that the Resilient Federal Forests Act passes Congress in the near future, and is signed into law. Our national forests are in a critical state of danger, and this legislation will go a long way toward better stewardship of our land.

For these reasons, El Dorado County is supporting H.R. 2647.

Sincerely, 
Brian K. Veerkamp
Chairman, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

cc:
Members, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors