

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 14, 2016

Chief Tom Tidwell
USDA Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Tidwell:

We are writing to request an increase in the FY 2016 timber sale program for the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF). Notwithstanding the obvious successes of the BHNF's timber sale program, we are concerned that the sawtimber volume planned for sale in FY 2016 is inadequate to sustain the existing forest products infrastructure.

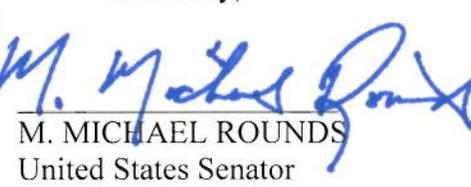
Although there have been some recent successes in fighting the mountain pine beetle in the Black Hills, the epidemic is far from over. Approximately 17,000 acres of trees were killed in 2015 in the BHNF as a result of the mountain pine beetle infestations, which is an increase over the 2014 acreage killed by the mountain pine beetle. Equally as concerning, according to recent Forest Service statements, approximately 50 percent of the BHNF remains at high risk for mountain pine beetle infestation. Salvaging and utilizing those trees is far more preferable than allowing them to become fuel for forest fires that threaten the communities and forests of the Black Hills.

We request an increased FY 2016 sale program, with a sawtimber target of 220,000 ccf, which would: 1) sustain the current forest products industry; 2) salvage more acres of trees already attacked by mountain pine beetles; 3) treat additional acres resulting in reduced potential for further mountain pine beetle infestations; and 4) reduce fire danger.

We look forward to your response. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


JOHN THUNE
United States Senator


M. MICHAEL ROUNDS
United States Senator


MICHAEL B. ENZI
United States Senator


JOHN BARRASSO
United States Senator


KRISTI NOEM
United States Congressman


CYNTHIA LUMMIS
United States Congressman