

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

March 3, 2021

The Honorable Vicki Christiansen  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Christiansen:

We write to express concern with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) recommendation to reduce the timber sale program on the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) and the process the USFS used to reach this recommendation. Further, we are concerned that a reduction in the sale program would have a detrimental impact on the ability of the USFS to manage and care for the forests in the Black Hills and on the health of our local communities.

Notably, the BHNF Advisory Board recently recommended that the timber sale program not be reduced below the allowable sale quantity in the current BHNF forest plan. This recommendation was formed with participation by the South Dakota and Wyoming state foresters, forest management professionals, and others after months of research and data analysis.

In 2018, the South Dakota and Wyoming Congressional offices wrote to you expressing concern with the premature efforts by the BHNF to examine flawed data pertaining to timber resources on the BHNF while new information was being gathered by the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA). At the time, stakeholders in the Black Hills were assured there would be a collaborative process to examine the data and develop a path forward for the best use of the data collected by the FIA. This position of collaboration was reiterated in your response letter which stated, “When the FIA dataset becomes available we will work collaboratively with industry and others to develop a course of action for analysis.”

Unfortunately, we are concerned about the lack of collaboration in analyzing and determining how to use the FIA data. At the same time the congressional offices sent a letter in 2018, the BHNF was commissioning a timber resources report without informing any stakeholders in the Black Hills. A draft of that report was released in early 2020 without any input from stakeholders, and since that time, input has been constrained to one comment period.

As you know, the BHNF has been nationally recognized as an example of how proactive forest management can be successful in reducing impacts from mountain pine beetles and wildfires, with multiple senior officials touring the BHNF to see the successes firsthand. The BHNF is one of the last National Forests where, together, we can still implement forest management on a meaningful scale to benefit forest health.

To continue successful management and care of the BHNF, we urge the USFS to substantially increase involvement from the states of South Dakota and Wyoming, local county commissions, and other stakeholders who stand to be most affected, including the forest products industry, in discussions of the BHNF timber sale program and forest planning. We also request that the USFS immediately implement the recommendations from the BHNF Advisory Board, including maintaining the timber sale program at 181,000 ccf sawtimber and 21,000 ccf of 5-9" trees, and prioritize providing resources needed for the BHNF to accomplish the recommendations.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE  
United States Senator



JOHN BARRASSO, M.D.  
United States Senator



M. MICHAEL ROUNDS  
United States Senator



CYNTHIA LUMMIS  
United States Senator



DUSTY JOHNSON  
Member of Congress



LIZ CHENEY  
Member of Congress