United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 18, 2025

Secretary Brooke Rollins
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Rollins:

Congratulations on your recent confirmation to lead the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and thank you for your commitment to work with the forest products industry to address the urgent situation in the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF).

The BHNF has a long legacy of successful forest management practices, beginning with the first-in-the-nation federal timber sale in 1899. This success continued through the mountain pine beetle epidemic that ran from 1997 to 2016 when the BHNF gained national recognition working with the states, counties, and forest products industry to end the epidemic. However, over the last few years, the BHNF has again faced significant challenges, and the forest products industry and surrounding communities are suffering as a result.

As discussed in your confirmation hearing, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) during the Biden administration authorized only a fraction of the BHNF's allowable timber sale quantity in an effort to further its unreasonable climate policies. For FY25, the entire timber sale program on the BHNF is expected to be substantially less than what a sawmill facility needs to stay operational. This comes after the Biden administration reduced timber harvest targets for FY23 and FY24 as part of its clear intention to eliminate the multiple-use approach for the management of our federal lands. These actions do not come without consequence.

Sawmill facilities are running at reduced capacities or shipping material long distances from other states, accumulating staggering financial losses in the process. In fact, multiple sawmills across the Black Hills have already closed or drastically reduced operations, and additional closures are imminent should this situation not improve, adversely affecting workers and communities in the area. These closures also bring the loss of capacity needed to manage and care for the BHNF and address expanding pine beetle populations and wildfire risks.

Our offices have continually advocated for maintaining a strong timber sale program for the BHNF and sensible timber management practices. Therefore, we request that the USFS act quickly to increase the timber sale program targets for the BHNF to avert additional sawmill closures and other adverse economic impacts.

Congratulations again on your confirmation, and we look forward to working with you to promptly address this issue.

Sincerely,

John Thune
United States Senator

John Barrasso M.D.
United States Senator



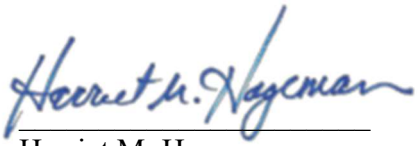
M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Cynthia Lummis
United States Senator



Dusty Johnson
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Harriet M. Hageman
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