

May 9, 2012

Honorable President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Across the American West, there are more than 400 million acres of private and public grasslands, rangelands, and forests. The stewardship of these public, private, and tribal lands is inextricably linked to the economic vitality of rural communities.

We are participants of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, the National Rural Assembly, and others who represent Native nations, elected county officials, community-based organizations, rural businesses, and private landowners. **This group of over 100 leaders and organizations from across the nation ask that your Administration maintain a steadfast commitment to the future of our rural economies, and investments in the land and water on which we depend.**

Our public, private, and tribal lands provide life-sustaining benefits for both rural and urban communities such as clean water, clean air, healthy forests, wildlife and fish habitat, fuel and food, and countless recreational opportunities. Acting as good stewards of these resources creates jobs that cannot be exported.

Already, agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service administer programs and services that are essential to successful local partnerships, which turn federal conservation investments in public and private lands into steady paychecks, healthy ecosystems, and vital community services such as schools and hospitals.

The recession hit the rural West hard, yet there are countless examples of locally-led conservation efforts -- in partnership with federal funding and support -- sustaining our communities:

- A sawmill in John Day, Oregon installed a pellet facility that saved the business and created and retained 85 jobs. Here, \$5 million in federal investment leveraged \$50 million in private sector funds.
- In 2011, a Colorado nonprofit, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP), utilized \$1.04 million in federal funds toward projects ranging from energy conservation to forest thinning and river restoration. Federal funding allowed CUSP to not only create and retain 14.5 internal jobs, but also helped to support 7 full-time equivalent jobs with local contractors.
- A restoration project on the Flathead National Forest in Montana employed 60 people and generated \$2 million in revenue reinvestment in federal lands management.

- The Salmon-Challis National Forest in Idaho restored 13,000 acres, and local businesses benefited from more than 90 percent of the revenue.
- In Northeastern Oregon the Enterprise School is saving \$100,000 annually by heating its school with the byproducts of forest restoration. In a school district struggling to keep its doors open, this conservation-driven solution kept 1.5 teachers employed.

Although constraints on the economy necessitate a cautious approach to federal spending, we believe that maintaining and -- in some cases -- increasing federal funding to ensure priority ecological values are restored and protected is the best way to ensure the health of our land and water, transform rural economies, and create needed jobs.

The undersigned entities support and advocate for federal conservation funding and leadership that demonstrates commitment to an inclusive rural America and the working landscapes that sustain the foundation of our country and the economic strength of our communities. Federal investments in conservation are commitments to the people, places, livelihoods and future of rural America.

Sincerely,

Martin Goebel, President
Sustainable Northwest
Portland, Oregon

Dee Davis, President
Center for Rural Strategies
Whitesburg, Kentucky

cc:

U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar
U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack
White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley

Signatories

Alaska

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Sitka Conservation Society

Arkansas

Bill Kopsky, Executive Director
Arkansas Public Policy Panel

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Ms. Lisa Diehl
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