

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage
Conservation Council*

July 20, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington D.C. 20250

Re: Managing for Healthy and Resilient Forests

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

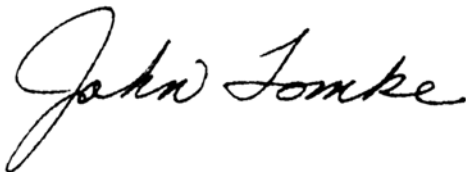
On behalf of the Council I want to express our appreciation for being hosted by the U.S. Forest Service Southwest Regional Office in Albuquerque for our meeting June 14 and 15th. The Council was interested in gaining a fuller understanding of the challenges faced in preventing, managing, and recovering from wildfires and selected the location to facilitate participation by wildfire management and recovery experts.

The Council was not disappointed by the engagement and quality of participation by Forest Service staff and leadership. Southwest Office Director Corbin Newman and Fire and Aviation Director Bob Leaverton took precious time out of their busy schedules to ensure that the Council received an in-depth education about forest health, fire management, and recovery challenges at the state, regional and national scales. Forest Service Southwest Region staff Don DeLorenzo (Director for Wildlife, Fish, and Rare Plants) and Raul Sanchez (Wildlife Biologist) were particularly noteworthy in their commitment to seeing that the Council's needs were met at every turn. Mr. Leaverton and staff from the Santa Fe National Forest conducted an all-day field trip to educate the Council on recovery efforts associated with the Las Conchas Fire. The timing of the field trip and Council meeting was ironic, since New Mexico was going through a record-breaking wildfire at the time. Deputy Under Secretary Blazer was also able to spend time with the Council between his visits to active fire locations.

While the Council was impressed by the efforts of the Forest Service and all agencies involved in preventing and fighting wildfires, we were struck by the need for *upfront* investments in managing for healthy and resilient forests to better resist and recover from tomorrow's wildfires. The Council encourages you to support our forests to ensure their health in the face of impending threats, including wildfires.

Once again, the Council was ably hosted by the Forest Service Southwest Office and Santa Fe National Forest Staff and we greatly appreciate your continued engagement with the Council.

Sincerely,



Cc: Secretary Ken Salazar, DOI
Under Secretary Harris Sherman, USDA
Deputy Under Secretary Butch Blazer, USDA

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