

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2019

Vicki Christiansen
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
Yates Building, 4 Central
201 Fourteenth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Christiansen:

We request a status update on the development of the Phase 2 Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Four Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI).

We are dissatisfied by Forest Service progress in achieving the original goals of 4FRI, which includes mechanically restoring 1 million acres of national forest lands in Arizona to their natural, fire-resilient state. Under Phase 1 of 4FRI, the Forest Service issued an RFP that contemplated industry-driven thinning on 300,000 acres in Arizona over a 10-year term. Since 2012, barely 12,000 acres have been thinned by the primary 4FRI stewardship contractor Good Earth Power. In eastern Arizona, a collection of small timber operators have been more productive in completing Forest Service projects, but only when timber hauling distances are economical and if the Forest Service completes its environmental clearances in a timely manner. Unfortunately, the slow pace of 4FRI has left our forest communities, watersheds, and wildlife habitat at high risk for catastrophic wildfire. The status quo of forest management in Arizona is neither safe nor environmentally or economically sustainable.


The Phase 2 RFP offers the Forest Service an opportunity to learn from past mistakes and get 4FRI back on track. The RFP will benefit from a provision that we supported as part of the 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Act that authorizes 20-years stewardship agreements, which will provide industry with greater certainty when investing in large, landscape-scale restoration projects. The time is right for the Forest Service to develop an RFP that is designed to build, attract, and empower industry to accelerate the removal of low-value timber from our fire prone forests. To this end, we ask that Forest Service engage and remain engaged with state and local stakeholders in the crafting of the RFP as well as seek their consultation during the review and award process as appropriate.

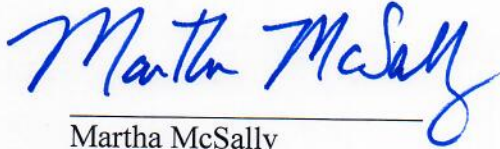
Outside of the Phase 2 RFP, we call upon the Forest Service to utilize other new authorities to advance forest treatment projects. As part of the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress recently expanded the use of "Good Neighbor Authority," which authorizes the Forest Service to enter into agreements with county and tribal governments to better manage federal lands adjacent to rural communities. We also ask the Forest Service to apply the principles covered in your "Shared Stewardship" strategy document issued in August 2018 to develop a statewide Memorandum of

Understanding or Master Stewardship Agreement that adopts an outcome-based approach when consulting with Arizona stakeholders to expedite forest treatments.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,


Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator


Martha McSally
United States Senator