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Date: May 10, 2022

Mr. Steve Ellis
Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
Post Office Box 273362
Ft. Collins, Colorado 80527

Dear Mr. Ellis:

Thank you for your letter of February 23, 2022, to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service regarding managing wildland fire. I apologize for the delayed response.

We share your concerns about the trajectory of wildfire and appreciate the interest and input from the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR). Your thoughtful position paper has been invaluable in the national conversation around fire tactics and strategies. We deeply appreciate your partnership and the trusted voice that NAFSR brings to forest and fire policy in this country. Changing the current trajectory of the wildfire crisis requires using all available tools to increase hazardous fuels reduction work and ensure all fires receive a strategic, risk-based response, including using fire where appropriate. Your paper makes that case strongly.

Using the significant funds we received from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, along with our regular appropriations, the Forest Service will work with partners to increase hazardous fuels reduction work by two to four times current levels across larger landscapes. This work requires long term, sustained effort to make a true difference in fire behavior and community resilience.

As we work to address immediate threats of uncharacteristic wildfire, it is important that we continue to take proactive steps to reduce future risks of damaging wildfires, including employing fire in the right place, at the right time, and for the right reasons when and where opportunities present themselves. Extensive science supports using fire on the landscape and recognizes it as an important tool to reduce risk and create resilient landscapes at the necessary scale. While we can manage fires to achieve multiple objectives when appropriate, this tool has become synonymous with the term "managed fire." This is problematic because the public, media, congressional members, and others have interpreted "managed fire" to be synonymous with "let it burn." Therefore, we have stopped using the term managed fire.

Rather, the Forest Service's policy is that every fire receives a strategic, risk-based response. The response is commensurate with the threats and opportunities and uses the full spectrum of management actions that consider fire and fuel conditions, weather, values at risk, resources available, and is aligned with the applicable *Land and Resource Management Plan*. As noted in your position paper, execution of the wildland fire policy has gone awry. We agree that a review of how the 2009 wildland fire policy is being applied is prudent to identify holes in the process



and procedural adjustments that may be appropriate to ensure our policies are keeping pace with the wildfire situation and are clearly communicated.

Finally, we are committed to an ongoing dialogue with our partners to ensure that safe and effective risk management principles are followed to protect communities, keep firefighters safe, and produce results that mitigate current and future risks from wildfire. Engaging with our partners in robust dialogue before and during incidents and pre-planning are best practices that yield better outcomes when wildfires happen. Therefore, all line officers and fire leadership will fully utilize pre-season engagement planning to leverage the best science available with community leaders and partners, along with State, County, and local governments.

Thank you for writing and for your ongoing support and engagement on critical Forest Service issues. We look forward to seeing you all soon, virtually or in person. If you have additional questions, please contact me at Jaelith.Hall-rivera@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaelith Hall - Rivera". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. There is a blue ink mark, possibly a stamp or a correction, over the middle of the signature.

JAELITH HALL-RIVERA
Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry