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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
FOREST, AND PUBLIC LANDS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE,
AND OCEANS

May 16, 2011

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As members of Congress with an interest in the management of our nation's public lands, waterways, and fish and wildlife populations and habitat, we welcome the conservation vision expressed in your proposed National Forest Management Act planning regulations. Maintaining and restoring the integrity, resiliency, and health of our national forests and watersheds are vital goals. At the same time, we are concerned that the proposed regulations lack the measurable standards and adequate safeguards to ensure this vision is realized. Further, we believe the proposal goes in the wrong direction by rolling back longstanding protections for wildlife.

We urge that the proposed regulations be strengthened to adequately protect and restore water and watersheds. The rivers, streams, and watersheds in our national forests play key roles in both human and natural environments, providing a variety of benefits, such as drinking water for millions of Americans, recreational opportunities, and habitat for fish and wildlife. While the proposed rule includes important watershed provisions, it lacks specificity and accountability. For example, while the proposal calls for the establishment of riparian buffers around streams, it does so without setting a minimum size and without explicitly setting protective standards for those riparian areas such as restricting activities known to be harmful. In order for the Forest Service to continue providing these values and safeguarding this vital resource, the final rule must direct plans to protect and restore key watersheds in our national forests through measurable, enforceable standards.

We also strongly urge that the proposed regulations be strengthened to ensure protection for fish and wildlife populations. The proposal suffers from weaknesses which collectively eliminate longstanding and vital protections intended to ensure that all native wildlife species remain viable on our national forests. First, the proposal does not require that species be monitored to demonstrate that forest management activities are actually maintaining fish and wildlife populations. Second, the wildlife standard suffers from excessive discretion; forest managers could selectively determine which species deserve protecting on our national forests. Moreover, the agency can arbitrarily absolve itself of the responsibility to protect these species because the criteria to do so are ambiguous. National forests are home to many of our most important fish and wildlife habitats, and host more rare species than any other federal lands system. They also serve as economic engines for local communities by providing wildlife-based recreation

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opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and bird watching. It is vital that the final rule include a strong standard for wildlife conservation that is meaningful, measurable, and non-discretionary.

With our forests facing unprecedented threats from climate change and unchecked energy development, strong protections for water and wildlife are essential, as we move forward in addressing these and other challenges of the 21st century. The course set by these sweeping new rules will determine the future of our national forests for generations to come – it is essential that we get this right. Wildlife and water are two fundamental indicators of the health and resilience of our forests. We urge the administration to revise its proposal to include clear standards for their protection so that future generations of Americans will not lose this legacy.

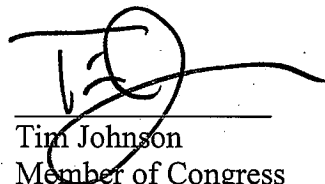
Sincerely,



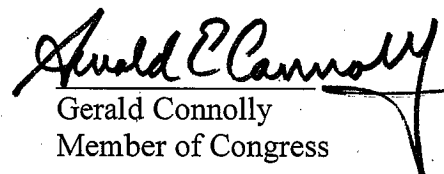
Ron Kind
Member of Congress



Martin Heinrich
Member of Congress



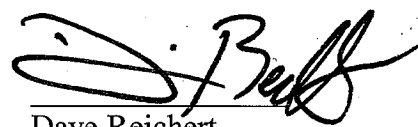
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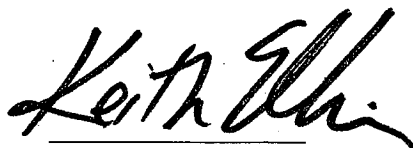
Gerald Connolly
Member of Congress




Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



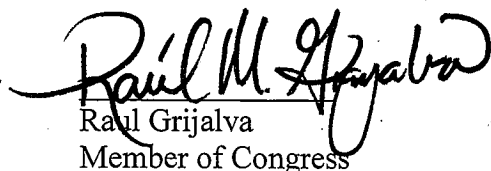
Dave Reichert
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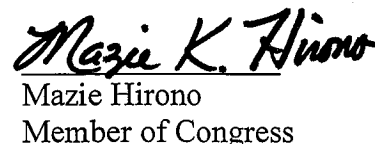
Keith Ellison
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Wm Lacy Clay
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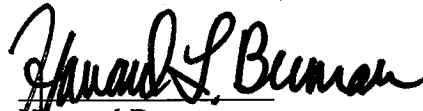
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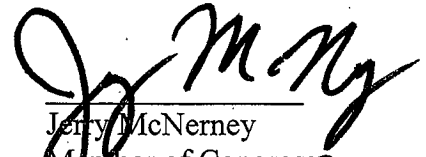


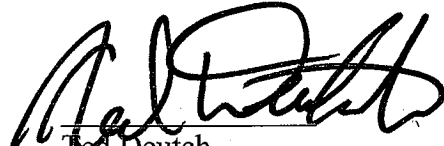
Mazie Hirono
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Maurice Hinchey
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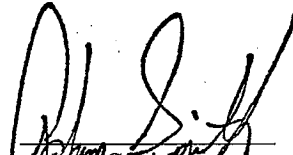

Jay Inslee
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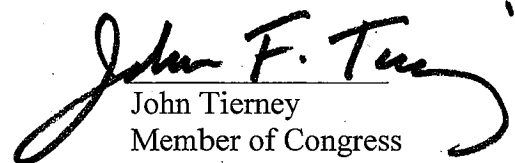

Howard Berman
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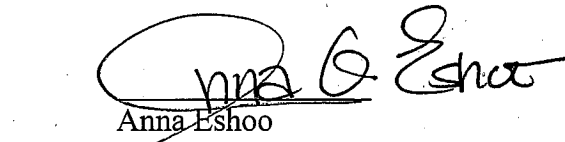

Jerry McNerney
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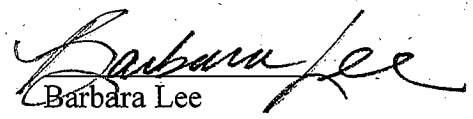

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Ed Pastor
Member of Congress

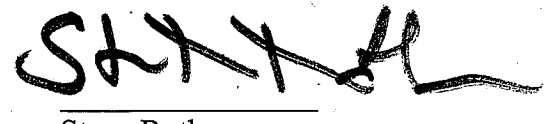

Adam Smith
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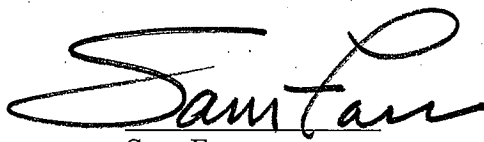

John Tierney
Member of Congress

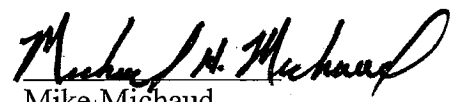

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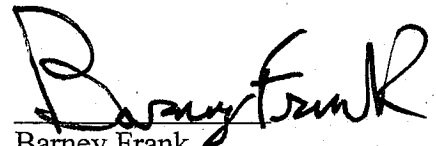
Carolyn Maloney
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Colleen Hanabusa

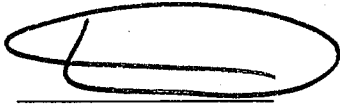
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Chris Van Hollen
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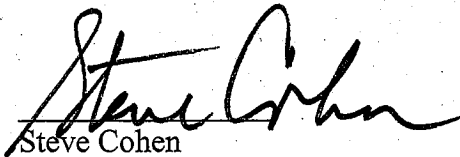
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David Wu
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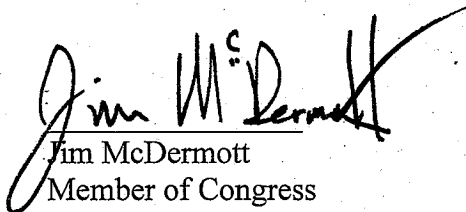
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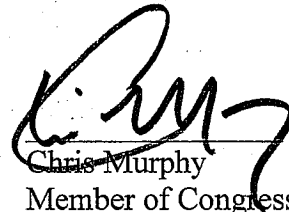
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