

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 14, 2014

COMMITTEES:
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

BUDGET

SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON AGING

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell:

I write to highlight the importance of Farm Bill forestry provisions to Wisconsin, and to urge you to implement them as soon as possible. Six months have passed since the Farm Bill was signed into law, and stakeholders in the state are eager to deploy the expanded Good Neighbor Authority and to use updated permanent Stewardship Contracting authorities.

Both of these authorities were designed to help the Forest Service partner with its neighbors to improve management efficiencies, reduce delays in the implementation of projects that are part of approved forest plans, and bring local and regional resources to the table to improve the health and productivity of our forests. These tools have the potential to increase the economic viability of our communities and improve wildlife habitat and forest health through contracts and projects conducted with the new authorities.

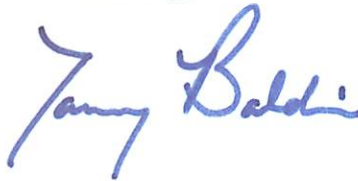
Good Neighbor Authority shows great potential in facilitating forest management work that could be completed through partnerships between the Forest Service and States, including Wisconsin. As you implement Good Neighbor Authority, I encourage you to provide flexibility for the implementation of the tool to allow local partners to use it to best meet specific project needs and maximize partnership efficiencies. In addition, I urge you to provide clear guidance and encouragement to national forest staff in order to assure timely and successful implementation of this newly expanded authority.

In addition, I urge you to implement the new permanent Stewardship Contracting authorities as soon as possible, and promote their use in our national forests. Many entities in Wisconsin are eager to take advantage of these long-term contracts in order to secure a predictable timber supply and deliver on long-term forest management outcomes that are important to the forest products industry and wildlife habitat. In Wisconsin, the potential partnerships between this network of forest management professionals and the Forest Service are not being fully realized, but encouraging the use of Stewardship Contracts will provide a step in the right direction.

Wisconsin's national forest lands make up a large portion of our working forests. Because of this, low and variable federal timber sales can have substantial negative impacts on our forest products industry. When cut rates slow, contracts are mired in uncertainty, and the Forest Service cannot provide a reliable supply of biomass and saw timber, the entire region feels the impact. Negative economic impacts of unreliable forest product supplies start with impacts on logging crews, continue to the wood products industry, and ultimately hurt local businesses and schools.

The new authorities provided by the 2014 Farm Bill are important tools for helping get our forests working better for industry and improving their long term health. I look forward to seeing these tools in action and to working with you to ensure they work for Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tammy" and the last name "Baldwin" clearly legible.

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator