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United States Senate

November 23, 2021

The Honorable Randy Moore, Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Moore:

I write to you to highlight the dire need for a project in the Basin Creek Watershed in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest to protect the municipal watershed for Butte. Forest Service has been reviewing a potential project in the area for years, and with the threat of severe wildfire growing each year, we need to actually mitigate the risks to Butte as soon as possible.

The Basin Creek Watershed is surrounded by Forest Service land, and provides water to approximately 60 percent of Butte's population. For nearly two decades, Forest Service has been approached and proposed fuels reduction projects to the basin, begun environmental analyses, and then abandoned their proposal, citing higher-priority projects including in recent weeks. Fuel loading in the area has moved beyond a crisis point, leading the City of Butte to build a \$30 million water treatment plant to address nutrient loading in the watershed from surrounding beetle killed trees. That treatment plant will not be able to handle the ash and additional sediment that will be pushed into the watershed if the nearby trees burn. We need to mitigate that risk before it's too late.

The *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* recently signed into law offers some real opportunities to address this issue. I fought to secure \$500 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects in national forests, \$100 million for Forest Service to contract with crews to remove flammable vegetation to be used for biochar and innovative wood products, and \$180 million for the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to reduce wildfire risk and protect water quality in municipal watersheds. Southwest Montana has willing partners that are ready to put these resources to work, from timber harvest to vegetation removal, to creation of innovative wood products. The *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* was designed from the ground up for opportunities like this one: protecting water quality, supporting the economy of rural communities, and mitigate the growing threat of severe wildfire driven by our changing climate.

I also encourage you to quickly put the \$50 million for Forest Service staff training in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* to work as quickly as possible. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge has been struggling under chronic understaffing for decades, since the merged forest was created. Reports indicate that Forest Service employs about 14,000 fewer forest management personnel than it did three decades ago. For forests like the Beaverhead-Deerlodge, this means that not only do projects like the Basin Creek Watershed get sidelined, but even basic functions like issuing a travel plan for the 2009 forest plan are stalled. This 3.2 million acre forest has some of the most diverse demands of any forest and is the epicenter of the mountain pine beetle epidemic. Butte's municipal watershed is in critical condition, but there are hundreds

of thousands of acres in need of treatment to protect this cherished forest from disaster. I stand ready to work with you to secure additional staffing for Forest Service to better management this one-of-a-kind landscape.

Thank you for your consideration Chief Moore, and I am eager to work with you to put this funding to work on the ground protecting the Basin Creek Watershed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Jon Tester