

December 13, 2010

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Suite 200-A  
Washington DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Sweeping new national forest management rules set to be released by the Obama administration in early 2011 provide a unique opportunity to continue the conservation legacy of President Theodore Roosevelt, who had the foresight to protect these treasured lands more than a century ago. Because of this vision, America enjoys 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands – including 16.9 million acres in Montana.<sup>i</sup> These are public lands that provide vital protection for fish and wildlife and clean drinking water for millions nationwide.

Today, our national forests and the wildlife and water resources they support, including those in Montana, face unprecedented threats that even a visionary leader such as Roosevelt could not have anticipated. Our forests, wildlife and watersheds, which require comprehensive restoration to remedy the effects of mismanagement, also face new challenges associated with climate change and encroaching development.

The new National Forest Management Act regulations must effectively protect and restore our national forests as we face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They must serve to anchor Forest Service management by giving the agency clear non-discretionary direction, as has been the case with the current regulations which were developed in 1982. At the same time, the new regulations must use sound and current science to safeguard healthy fish and wildlife populations and their habitats, and secure safe, clean water by creating management standards to protect and restore streams, rivers and watersheds.

We see the development of these comprehensive national forest management rules as one of the most important environmental actions that the administration will take during this term. The course set by these critical rules will determine the future of our forests, wildlife and watersheds for generations to come.

We look forward to working with you to develop a new framework for managing our national forests in this century of which President Roosevelt would be proud.

Sincerely,

K. E. Purcie Bennett, Esq., Executive Director  
John Meyer, Esq., Staff Attorney  
Cottonwood Environmental Law Center

Mike Leahy  
Rocky Mountain Region Director  
Defenders of Wildlife

Glenn Hockett  
Volunteer President  
**Gallatin Wildlife Association**

Mike Murray  
Commissioner  
**Lewis & Clark County**

Dave Strohmaier  
City Council Member  
**Missoula City Council**

Brian Sybert  
Executive Director  
**Montana Wilderness Association**

Mary Costello  
Director  
**Rock Creek Alliance**

Jim Costello  
Director  
**Save Our Cabinets**

Paul H. Shively  
Senior Organizing Manager  
**Sierra Club**

Keith Hammer  
Chair  
**Swan View Coalition**

Peter Aengst  
Regional Director, Northern Rockies Office  
**The Wilderness Society**

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/2009/LAR\\_Table\\_04.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/2009/LAR_Table_04.html)