

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 2, 2013

Kathleen Atkinson
Regional Forester
Eastern Region
U.S. Forest Service
500 Hanson Lake Road
Rhineland, WI 54501

Dear Ms. Atkinson:

We write to express our concerns regarding the health and sustainability of the Mark Twain National Forest (Mark Twain) and to request an evaluation of the manner in which it is being managed.

As you know, the Mark Twain consists of several large parcels of land from central Missouri down to the state's southern border, totaling roughly 1.5 million acres. If properly managed, the Mark Twain has the ability to provide great environmental and economic benefits to the state. Unfortunately, management of the Mark Twain is such that roughly 50 million board feet of timber, with an estimated value of \$4.75 million, dies each year. Alternatively, only 38 million board feet with an estimated value of \$4.37 million is harvested.

We believe maintaining the health and sustainability of the Mark Twain must be the highest priority. With annual mortality rates in excess of annual harvest rates, the Mark Twain is facing a potentially catastrophic situation. In order to reverse this alarming trend, we urge you to utilize harvesting to the full extent allowed under existing law.

Specifically, the *National Forest Management Act of 1976* requires a Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to guide resources management activities on each national forest for 10-15 year periods. The Forest Plan for the Mark Twain permits an Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) of 103 million board feet annually, and even allows for the annual ASQ to be exceeded as long as a decade limit of 1.030 million board feet is maintained. Given that harvest on the Mark Twain has been roughly 38 million board feet annually, the opportunity for increased volume is significant.

Recognizing the environmental directives and budget constraints under which national forests must be managed, we believe measures can be taken to streamline and expedite harvesting permits in an effort to increase harvest volume. While we urge you to explore all options, we believe that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews for harvesting can be streamlined by expanding their scope to include increased acreage. Additionally, we believe stocking reduction on the Mark Twain should be performed in a manner that ensures a market for removed timber.

Separately, in an effort to promote forest health through the restoration of shortleaf pine-oak woodlands, Secretary Vilsack in 2012 selected 100,000 acres of the Mark Twain to be enrolled in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLRP). CFLRP is a 10 year project with a budget of \$12.5 million intended to utilize controlled burns and harvesting to convert forests into shortleaf pine-oak woodlands.

Constituents who have evaluated the impacts of initial CFLRP burns are very concerned about the results. The large size of the burns and failure to utilize cut hardwoods has created a residual forest condition with scorched overstory trees and bare mineral soil. A number of trees the burns intended to promote were exposed to excessive heat, which has increased mortality. Moreover, burns have caused the forest floor to become more susceptible to erosion.

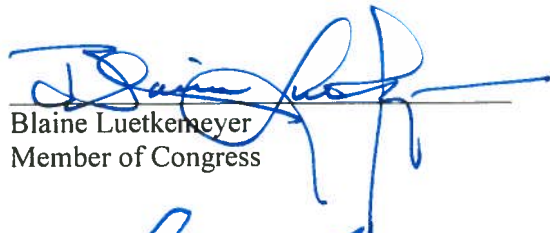
We believe that CFLRP burns should be monitored and evaluated to make sure they are achieving desired objectives. Specifically, the desired outcome should have measurable objectives to which field data can be compared in order to ultimately determine success or failure. Additionally, and beyond our concerns with the controlled burns, we want to ensure that CFLRP's implementation in the Mark Twain is not hindering the Forest Service's ability to effectively manage the remaining 1.4 million acres of the forest.

In closing, we request that you conduct an evaluation of recent and current management practices on the Mark Twain, including CFLRP acres, as it relates to the overall health of the forest. We encourage you to utilize Forest Inventory and Analysis data to conduct your evaluation of tree mortality on the Mark Twain and ask that you share with us your conclusions.

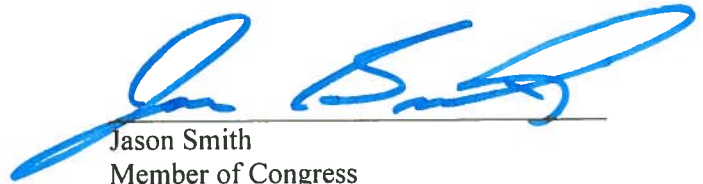
Dead and dying trees must be systematically removed from the forest in order to improve forest health and chart a direction for future sustainability. Considerable progress can be made toward improving forest health by using Missouri's strong forest products industry to help harvest and remove dead and dying trees. We believe such progress can be achieved through existing regulations and congressional directives, and urge you to utilize your discretion to prioritize forest health in this manner.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns and request that you provide a response including the findings of your evaluation by September 1, 2013.

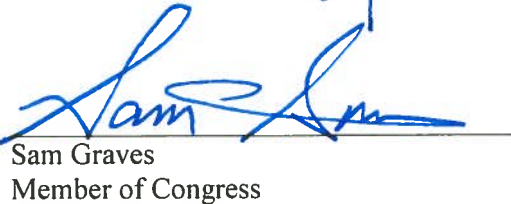
Sincerely,



Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress



Jason Smith
Member of Congress



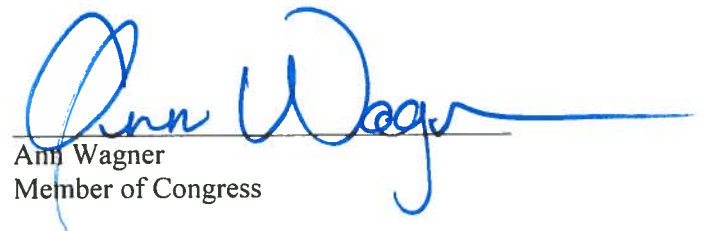
Sam Graves
Member of Congress



Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress



Billy Long
Member of Congress



Ann Wagner
Member of Congress

CC: Thomas Tidwell, Chief, U.S. Forest Service