

United States Senate

March 30, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington D.C., 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Thank you for your leadership supporting rural communities, especially during this critical time. As the U.S. Department of Agriculture continues enacting measures in response to the COVID-19 National Emergency, I request you take immediate action to minimize the disruption to the wood products industry caused by this pandemic. I stand ready to assist you in supporting this industry and the rural economies it sustains.

I ask that you continue preparing and offering new timber sales, which will provide certainty for the industry and new economic opportunities in rural communities while promoting a more resilient forest prior to wildfire season. To that end, I urge you to utilize available technologies to allow meetings, sale preparation, and administrative activities to continue without delay and allow for flexible, innovative approaches to accomplish needed field work while following social distancing directives. It is critical the agency allows ongoing sales to continue and provide contract relief to ensure timber purchasers are not forced to comply with provisions that do not reflect the changing market.

In addition to the request above, I urge your team to consider providing all timber sale contract holders with a two-year extension, suspend periodic payments under current timber sale contracts and stewardship contracts, and release deposits and bonds on suspended timber sales. These steps will ensure the wood products industry, critical to the health of forests and rural economies, can sustain this crisis.

It is crucial that any future stimulus legislation or supplemental appropriations bill supports the Forest Service accounts that promote job growth in rural communities through active forest management and other commercial activities to improve the condition of our national forests. Please provide my office with the Forest Service accounts that would best fit those goals and how this additional funding would be utilized, including projects in Montana that could be implemented or expedited if additional resources were made available.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your feedback and partnering with you to provide relief to this vital industry not only in Montana but throughout the entire country.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator