

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
212A Whitten Building
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

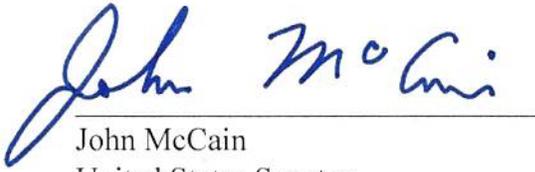
Congratulations to you, the U.S. Forest Service, and the numerous stakeholders involved in successfully finalizing a Record of Decision on the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), the nation's premier landscape-scale long-term forest restoration plan. While signing the document represents a significant achievement, we also hope it serves as a call to action to accelerate the pace and scale of forest thinning in Arizona.

With this National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis complete, the Forest Service and 4FRI contractors should be in a position to move forward with forest restoration projects on more than 586,000 acres of national forest system lands in Arizona using mechanical thinning and prescribed burns. Such a cost-effective approach to treatment work is critical to reducing the severity and long-term cost of catastrophic wildfires, which have consumed more than a million acres of our state's pine forests since 2002. Moreover, such proactive forest management will help safeguard critical drinking water supplies during this time of ongoing drought. For years, we have heard that the lack of a completed NEPA analysis was one of the biggest impediments to aggressively thinning our forest. Now, that is no longer an excuse.

An anchor contractor, Good Earth Power AZ, has already been approved to handle the first swath of the 10-year 4FRI plan. While the Forest Service representations to this effect when the contractor was originally retained was intriguing—catalyzing commercial harvests of small-diameter logs and slash for manufacturing wood products and biofuel, and development of a mill in Williams, Arizona—the results have yet to materialize. In fact, only about 3,700 out of the 21,500 acres of task orders have been completed.

In the end, performance on the ground will be the real measure of successes for the collaborative 4FRI effort. It is our expectation that with the recent 4FRI decision penned, demonstrable progress will be made to thin our forests beginning this summer. Therefore, we respectfully request that you continue to make this project a priority and that you provide us with routine progress report updates on 4FRI treatment projects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John McCain". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John McCain
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeff Flake". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jeff Flake
United States Senate