

NEWS RELEASE
GOVERNOR STEVE BULLOCK
STATE OF MONTANA

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Governor Bullock Identifies National Forest Landscapes For Priority Attention
Priority landscapes the result of collaboration between industry and conservationists;
will create more jobs for Montanans

HELENA – Recognizing the urgent need to address the failing health of our National Forests, today Governor Steve Bullock nominated landscapes in Montana for priority forest restoration work.

The Agriculture Act of 2014, commonly referred to as the “Farm Bill,” sets forth a process where the Governor of a state may nominate area landscapes that are impacted by insects and disease, to the Secretary of Agriculture. If those landscapes are then designated by the Secretary, forest management in those areas will be pursuant to an efficient and prioritized planning process, with rigorous science and allowing for full public involvement. Only those areas characterized by declining forest health, a risk of substantially increased tree mortality, or an imminent risk to public infrastructure, health, or safety, may be nominated.

In the letter to the US Department of Agriculture, Bullock said: “There is a lot of work to be done in the woods: to reduce fire risk, protect communities and municipal water supplies, and preserve and repair key streams and fisheries. In addition, our national forests, if sustainably managed, can be valuable carbon stores and play an important role in combating climate change. The health of our integrated wood products industry is critical as we look toward the future – the forest industry workforce is a vital tool to implement forest restoration projects that address these issues.”

At over 5 million acres, these proposed priority landscape nominations appear to be relatively large. However, these nominations will chart the course for national forest management for the next 15 years. The scale of these nominations provides the flexibility to address forest health and restoration needs during that time period, and creates broad opportunity for Montanans to work together.

Additionally, it is important to note that these are landscapes being nominated, not actual projects. Specific projects will be identified which will occur within the priority landscapes, but work will not occur on the entirety of the acres nominated.

Many of these nominated landscapes arise from diverse groups of Montanans who are already working together to build forest management projects that meet a variety of needs, not only providing logs on trucks and reduced wildfire risk, but also restored trout streams and elk habitat, among other community objectives.

Groups working on identifying landscapes for nomination, and the projects proposed to occur within those landscapes, include:

- Representatives from the logging and wood products industry;
- Conservation groups including:
 - Trout Unlimited;
 - The Greater Yellowstone Coalition;
 - The Yaak Valley Forest Council; and
 - Blackfoot Challenge
- County Commissioners from affected counties;
- National Forest supervisors; and
- National Forest district rangers.

As a yardstick to measure progress, Bullock says his “expectation [is] that the Forest Service will prioritize projects that accomplish a few important objectives:

- Meaningfully address forest health issues at a landscape scale, mitigating wildfire risks to make our communities safer;
- Provide wood to local mills, sustaining and creating jobs and boosting our local economies;
- Strengthen collaborative citizen efforts that build broad-based projects to not only address hazardous fuels, but also aggressively conduct needed restoration work for fisheries and wildlife; and
- Generate revenues that are sufficient to pay for the costs of implementing the projects.

“I believe that the Farm Bill Forestry Title represents a tremendous opportunity to move national forest management in Montana beyond the conflict and stagnation of the past two generations,” Bullock said. More effort will be necessary by all of those involved to improve the health of our national forests, but I am optimistic that these nominations are an important first step toward achieving that end.”

“You can’t drive across Montana without noticing the devastation caused by the pine beetle. We must take action to clean up our forests. Between the Farm Bill and my Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, we have an opportunity to turn dead, red trees into good-paying jobs and healthy forests. I urge Secretary Vilsack to take a close look at Governor Bullock’s proposal,” Sen. Jon Tester said of the proposal.

"Montana forests need better management to restore forest health, improve fish and wildlife habitat, and reduce the risk of fire," said Senator John Walsh, the only Montana representative serving on an agriculture committee with oversight of the Farm Bill. "When I worked with the National Guard, forest fires threatened both our residents and our tourism industry, and cost money and resources to control and extinguish. I applaud Governor Bullock for taking advantage of this important Farm Bill initiative and look forward to working with him and Montana's stakeholders to implement it."

Bullock's letter to the US Department of Agriculture can be found at:
<http://dnrc.mt.gov/Forestry/priority-landscapes/pdf/statewide.pdf>

A map of Bullock's proposed landscapes can be found at:
http://governor.mt.gov/docs/Final_Statewide_PriorityLandscapes.pdf

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