Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 6, 2011

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20010

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write you to express our concern with the bark beetle epidemic, which has destroyed or damaged more than 41 million acres of pine forests in the last 14 years. We would also like to express our gratitude for your dedication to address this emergency situation which has severely impacted forests in the Rocky Mountain Region of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

The Rocky Mountain Region has struggled to keep ahead of the bark beetle epidemic as the situation grows even more severe each year. As you are aware, investments were made toward bark beetle recovery efforts in the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) totaling $40 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. These funds, specifically dedicated to bark beetle activities, enabled the Forest Service to carry out critical hazard mitigation activities in the region.

We share your goals of sound, long-term forest management, protection of public safety and critical infrastructure. To meet these goals, it is essential to maintain sustained support to address the spread of bark beetles. It is imperative that we have a sense of urgency this spring to address this problem before the beetles spread to healthy areas of the forests in the summer.

It is our understanding that there are unobligated funds from FY 2010, which could be used for western beetle mitigation. We have been supportive of efforts to redirect some of the unobligated FY 2010 USFS funds toward bark beetle mitigation activities in the Rocky Mountain Region. While we are fully aware of the fiscal situation of the nation and scarce funding resources, we maintain that redirecting some of the unused funds to respond to this national emergency is an opportunity to use existing resources where they are greatly needed.

Healthy forests are important to the livelihood of millions of people in the West and critical to economic recovery. The forests are a source of a reliable water supply, tourism, energy generation, and recreation for the region. Swift action is essential in the face of threats to public safety and critical infrastructure.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to your response.

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Sincerely,

Kristi Noem
Member of Congress

Scott Tipton
Member of Congress

Cynthia Lummis
Member of Congress

Lee Terry
Member of Congress

Jared Polis
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