



SOUTHERN UTE INDIAN TRIBE

October 14, 2025

Senator John Hickenlooper
Hart Senate Office Building
120 Constitution Ave. NE
Suite SH-316
Washington, DC 20510

Via email: john_hickenlooper@hickenlooper.senate.gov

RE: Support for S.1462 – Fix Our Forests Act

Dear Senator Hickenlooper,

On behalf of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe (“Tribe”), I submit this letter in support of the bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act, S. 1462, with three suggested modifications. Like much of the southwest, wildfire risk is consistently high on the Southern Ute Indian Tribe’s Reservation (“Reservation”), and the Tribe is familiar with long and challenging fire seasons.¹ The Act aims to directly confront these challenges by expediting forest management and restoration, enhancing community resilience, and improving wildfire prevention through new programs, innovations, and partnerships. The Tribe strongly supports these efforts.

To further strengthen these efforts and in clear recognition of Tribal sovereign authority, however, we recommend three modifications to the Act. First, we recommend that the Act require formal Tribal consultation prior to assuming the emergency fire management activities covered by Section 106 where those activities take place within the boundaries of an Indian Reservation. Tribes are most familiar with their own lands. Any actions that take place on Tribal lands must be coordinated with the Tribe to ensure protection of natural and cultural resources and the safety of the membership. Second, the Tribe recommends that Section 117 concerning grazing for wildfire risk reduction either limit or prohibit grazing during drought. Grazing during drought does not control or eradicate invasives. To the contrary, it reduces fine fuels that reoccur annually and it is not an effective fire mitigation tool. These two changes will support the Act’s worthy objective of enhancing active forest management of federal land while satisfying the federal government’s obligations to Tribes as we work together to navigate fire

¹ In 2025, the Four Corners area, which is home to the Tribe’s Reservation, faced seven large fires, two of which directly impacted the Tribe’s Reservation. The Rim Road fire burned approximately 97 acres and the Ute 63 fire burned approximately 530 acres across the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute Reservations. Thirty-four other fires were kept under 10 acres. *See*, Southern Ute Reservation rescinds Stage I Fire Restrictions, Southern Ute Drum, BIA Forestry, September 19, 2025, available at [Southern Ute Reservation rescinds Stage I Fire Restrictions – The Southern Ute Drum](#)

seasons that become increasingly challenging.² Third, we recommend that Section 121 regarding Judicial Review be narrowly amended to allow Tribes to request an extension of the 150-day statute of limitations for projects that are likely to affect Tribal resources. Unlike private parties, Tribes have a government-to-government relationship with the federal government, which serves as trustee for some tribal land and resources. The very short 150-day limitations period does not permit the necessary consultation between the Tribe and the federal government before litigation is instituted.

Our ability to manage challenging wildfire seasons will require Tribes, states, and the federal government to genuinely commit to a collaborative approach to wildfire response and mitigation – a key focus of the Act and an approach consistent with the Tribe’s longstanding fire mitigation efforts. The Tribe’s Forestry Division has actively managed the risk of catastrophic wildland fire for decades by using a variety of management tools. This has resulted in a significant reduction of the risk of stand replacement catastrophic wildland fire, improvement in overall forest health and wildlife habitat, especially for big game species, protection of life and property on the Reservation, and increased wildland firefighter safety. Interagency cooperation is critical to these efforts because wildfires do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. As the Tribe’s management program operates within a complex setting of mixed ownership land and a wide variety of ecotypes and landforms, we routinely rely on cooperative arrangements with federal and local partners to respond to wildfires and manage forests to reduce the risk of outbreak. The Act’s emphasis on increasing federal support and enhancing interagency preparedness with adequate resources and trained qualified personnel will greatly benefit the Tribe and the broader community and will make us all safer.

The Tribe sincerely appreciates your ongoing commitment and willingness to work across the aisle to help mitigate the significant risk of catastrophic wildfires – a constant threat in our region – and to ensure the Tribe receives adequate consultation on these efforts. We strongly support passage of the Fix Our Forests Act with the modifications concerning formal Tribal consultation, grazing and the statute of limitations as detailed above.

Sincerely,



Melvin J. Baker
Chairman
Southern Ute Indian Tribe

CC: Hon. Michael Bennet, United States Senator

² With the ‘Fix Our Forests Act’, Sen. Hickenlooper hopes to jump start a new era of forest management and wildfire prevention, CPR News, Caitlyn Kim, June 10, 2025, available at [With the ‘Fix Our Forests Act’, Sen. Hickenlooper hopes to jump start a new era of forest management and wildfire prevention](#)