

United States Senate

May 28, 2024

Chief Randy Moore
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Chief Moore,

We write to you regarding the recent layoffs at the Neiman Enterprises sawmill near the Black Hills National Forest. On April 11, 2024, Neiman Enterprises announced that it would be curtailing production and laying off 50 employees at their last remaining South Dakota facility, Spearfish Forest Products. This announcement came roughly three years after Neiman Enterprises was forced to close their sawmill in Hill City, South Dakota, upending the lives of another 120 hard-working individuals.

Unfortunately, dwindling sawmill capacity near our nation's national forest is not unique to the Black Hills. Since 2020, more than 20 mills near national forests have been forced to curtail production or close altogether. While the timber industry faces its own unique market pressures, the recent layoffs are a direct result of reductions to the U.S. Forest Service's timber sale program. Inconsistent log supplies from our national forests undermine our local sawmills and it is unacceptable.

Without a dependable and affordable supply of timber from our national forests, these businesses will not survive. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, the Black Hills National Forest timber harvest target sits at 63,000 CCF (one CCF is equal to 100 Cubic Feet). This is only half of the 120,000 CCF that the forest was able to cut and sell in FY 2023.

The layoffs at Spearfish Forest Products are a direct result of these drastic reductions in the timber sale program and reflect the tragic and all-too-real consequences of the Biden Administration's misguided and harmful policies. Across Wyoming and South Dakota, we are experiencing the impacts from this administration's extreme climate obsession, resulting in efforts to lock up public lands and restrict multiple use mandates, regardless of the local economy.

If the Spearfish Forest Products facility and the other few remaining mills in the Black Hills region are forced to close, we will reverse years of progress. Without the forest products sector, forest health will suffer, catastrophic wildfire risk will grow, and damage from insects and diseases will become more likely. The ripple effects from stifling sustainable timber harvests will harm our economy, devalue forest grazing leases, and jeopardize the recreation opportunities we depend on. The forest products industry is hanging on by a thread and continued reductions to the timber sale program cannot continue.

For years we've heard false promises from the Forest Service. The agency has not expressed interest in attempting to find real solutions to the problems we face in the Black Hills. In September, 2023, you encouraged the Black Hills timber industry to invest in new equipment

and costly retrofits that could process small diameter trees and other forest residuals – materials that are different from those traditionally harvested and have little to no commercial value. You also suggested that the industry should consider moving away from producing lumber and transition to other by-products that could be used for construction. Aside from the timber transport pilot program, which brought logs by rail from California to the Black Hills, we have seen no efforts to increase timber harvest levels or help the industry.

The fact is, as verified by your own agency’s data, there is more timber on the Black Hills National Forest than in 1970s and 1980s. The forest can and should immediately increase its timber harvest levels. We should not be relying on the timber industry to reinvent itself and retrofit their facilities when we have access to the very resources they are designed to process. No one is asking the Forest Service to clear cut old growth for timber supply – but we know actively managing our forests, including commercial timber harvests, improves forest health and reduces wildfire risk.

In the interest of protecting the remaining forest products industry in the Black Hills, we request written responses to the following questions before June 28, 2024:

1. What is the Forest Service doing to increase timber harvest levels on the Black Hills National Forest?
2. What are the main drivers of the timber target shortfalls since 2018?
3. What resources does the agency need to increase timber harvest levels on the Black Hills National Forest? If the agency needs additional funding, please provide a specific amount and breakdown of how it will be used to increase timber harvest levels above 63,000 CCF.
4. How many years will it take for the agency to ramp up to harvest levels to meet the collaboratively identified 120,000 CCF target?
5. Will the agency commit to preventing further economic harm to the forest products industry by providing a consistent supply of timber?

We appreciate your attention and prompt response to these questions. Please contact our offices with any questions you may have regarding this request.

Sincerely,



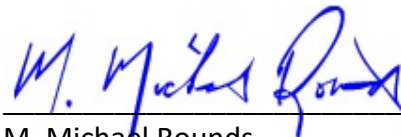
Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator



John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator