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April 3, 2017

Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

We understand there are plans to reintroduce bipartisan legislation – the Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act – that would, if enacted, help ensure reliable electricity service and reduce the risk of fires and fire hazards that result from inadequate vegetation management on power line rights-of-way. Western Governors supported such legislation in the 114th Congress ([H.R. 2358](#)) and urge the Committee to give such legislation expedited review upon its reintroduction.

Western Governors recognize the importance of appropriate fire management and proactive wildfire mitigation. Additionally, we are committed to safeguarding and enhancing the reliability of the region's electric transmission grid. Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution [2016-06](#), *Wildland Fire Management and Resilient Landscapes*, and the 2013 WGA [Ten-Year Energy Vision](#) further elaborate on these priorities. Legislation such as that advanced by the House last year can play an important role in realizing these imperatives.

Governors support legislation that recognizes the need for efficient cross-jurisdictional coordination and enables utilities to take necessary actions to enhance grid reliability and reduce the threat of wildfires to and from electric transmission and distribution rights-of-way. We suggest that the legislation include the following key elements:

- Provide electric utilities defined authority to remove dangerous trees even if they exist outside a designated right-of-way and allow pruning or removal of trees;
- Require that rights-of-way be developed in coordination with the right-of-way holder;

Honorable Rob Bishop
Honorable Raul Grijalva
April 3, 2017
Page 2

- Minimize the need for case-by-case or annual agency approval for routine vegetation management activities to facilitate inspection, operation and maintenance of the right-of-way and for activities necessary to control so-called “hazard trees” within or adjacent to the right-of-way;
- Require prompt review of vegetation management, facility inspection and operation and maintenance plans; and
- Require the relevant federal agency to apply National Environmental Policy Act categorical exclusion to plans developed in line with the legislation and on existing transmission and distribution rights-of-way.

Thank you for your leadership in advancing this important legislation, which seeks to provide another important tool for improving forest health across the West.

Respectfully,



Steve Bullock
Governor of Montana
Chair, WGA



Dennis Daugaard
Governor of South Dakota
Vice Chair, WGA

cc: House Natural Resources Committee Members