



## WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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► Press Release

### Western Governors Seek Greater State Authority in Managing Western Forests

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 16, 2011

**DENVER** -- In a [letter](#) to the Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Western Governors have proposed that a forest planning rule be revised to include greater state authority in managing the region's forests. More than 85 percent of the lands covered by the proposed rule are in Western states.

The governors said it is imperative that the U.S. Forest Service coordinate with states and others in refining and implementing the new rule. The letter was signed by Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter (Idaho), Chairman of the Western Governors' Association, and Gov. Christine Gregoire (Wash.), WGA Vice Chair.

"Given the joint authority and shared goals, it is imperative that the Planning Rule consistently and clearly recognize state authorities, as well as the need for inclusive processes and transparency, which will improve planning efforts and collaboration while reducing litigation," the letter stated.

"Further, given that both the Western Governors and the Obama administration have made the strengthening of our transmission grid a high priority, the Planning Rule must ensure that forest plans recognize this.

"With our recommended improvements to the draft rule, we can together ensure the health and productivity of our nation's forests, watersheds and wildlife."

The Governors comments and recommendations also included:

- The planning rule fails to acknowledge the unique authority states have to manage wildlife, forest and water resources and to protect public health and safety within their boundaries.
- A common landscape-scale vision for the sustainable management of forests is needed.
- The rule should be amended to consider how the Forest Service will work with Governors on large multi-forest, multi-state projects. A subsection of the rule should be developed to specifically address planning for transmission lines; other utility infrastructure and facilities; and mineral and energy resources.

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- Because the management of public lands can significantly impact the economy of some local communities, the planning rule must provide additional direction for an increase in large-scale forest restoration and more active management. The current definition of "productivity" should be amended to include economic productivity.
- The USFS should coordinate with states and ensure that forest, resource and fire management plans incorporate the plans and policies of state and local governments. States should have the opportunity to review, advise and provide suggestions on those issues and topics that may affect or influence state government programs.
- State wildlife agencies should be consulted and their data integrated into the planning processes at the earliest possible stage. The current language in the proposed rule only requires the Forest Service to "consider" state and locally developed water, wildlife and community fire protection plans.

The [letter](#) and more information about WGA's forest health program are available on WGA's Web site at [www.westgov.org](http://www.westgov.org).

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**About the WGA:** The Western Governors' Association is an independent, nonprofit organization representing the governors of 19 states and three US-Flag Pacific islands. Through their Association, the governors identify and address key policy and governance issues, including those related to natural resources, the environment, human services, economic development, intergovernmental relations and international relations.