USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

April 3, 2024

THE HONORABLE JEFF MERKLEY
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
United States Senate
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley:

This letter transmits a status update to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service response to the Committee's request, in House Report 117-400, Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill 2023, to provide a report detailing the status of research about mill capacity in the western United States. This letter includes the pertinent information that is needed to update the committee.

In September 2023, the Forest Service entered into an agreement with the University of Montana, Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) to analyze mill capacity across the western United States. BBER's initial charge is to analyze mill capacity associated with the 21 Wildfire Crisis Landscapes as these are the Forest Service's highest priority areas to restore forest health and reduce the risk, severity, and frequency of catastrophic wildfire. Once this initial analysis is completed, BBER will expand their analysis across the West. We anticipate completion of the initial analysis in late Fiscal Year 2024, at which time additional information can be provided to the Committees.

After 45 days from the date of the transmittal to Congress, this letter will be posted to the Forest Service website at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/budget-performance.

If you have any questions, please have a member of your staff contact the Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720–7095. A similar letter is being sent to Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary