

Forest Service faces new pressure to boost timber harvests



BY MARC HELLER
10/04/2021 04:09 PM EDT



Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.) during a hearing on Capitol Hill. Francis Chung/E&E News

E&E NEWS PM | The Forest Service is facing renewed pressure from Republican lawmakers to boost timber harvesting, after the agency said it would fall well short of its goal for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30.

Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.) urged the Forest Service in a letter today to step up the timber program this fiscal year to make up for the past year's shortfall. His letter comes on the heels of comments by House Agriculture ranking member Glenn Thompson (R-

Pa.) last week that the agency should aim to meet, or better yet exceed, the goals it's setting.

Blaming much of the 30 percent shortfall in Montana on the agency's legal entanglements, Daines told regional forest supervisor Leanne Marten, "While these dynamics are outside of your direct control, making up the volume lost in fiscal year 2022 would provide significant relief to Montanans and ensure needed hazardous fuel reduction projects move forward before it is too late."

In his [letter](#), Daines underscored the impact of the *Cottonwood Environmental Law Center v. Forest Service* ruling in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 2015 and subsequent interpretations, which require more consultation between the Forest Service and the Interior Department on potential threats to endangered species.

Daines said much of the timber shortfall in his state can be tied to that ruling, which he's repeatedly tried to overturn or weaken through legislation. The amount of potential timber encumbered in lawsuits is now greater than the amount in sales, he said.

Nationally, the Forest Service is dealing with a range of issues that held back timber sales, Forest Service Chief Randy Moore said at a House Agriculture subcommittee hearing last week, without mentioning litigation.

Moore said the Forest Service will probably reach just 60 percent of its 2021 goal of 4 billion board feet of timber and cited "different reasons we were not able to accomplish that."

Among other difficulties, Moore said, some areas in Western forests that were slated for timber sales were hit by wildfires, so "we've lost the ability to do that."

In addition, he said, wildfires forced the agency to move employees who might have been preparing timber sales to more urgent tasks.

For the fiscal year that started Oct. 1, the Forest Service said it would trim the timber goal to 3.4 billion board feet. If officials can meet that amount, it would reflect an increase over actual recent timber harvests ([Greenwire](#), June 1).