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Date: DEC 09 2013

The Honorable John McCain
United States Senate
241 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McCain:

Thank you for your letter of November 8, 2013, expressing concern about a press release regarding abandoned trailers on the Coconino, Kaibab, and Prescott National Forests in northern Arizona. I regret the confusion and concern from the hunting community in Arizona caused by this miscommunication to the public.

First, let me emphasize that the Forest Service welcomes hunters to the National Forests and Grasslands. The National Forest System provides some of the most diverse and productive wildlife habitat in the country, and we cherish the heritage of hunting and fishing on these public lands. As you state, very often hunts on our National Forests can last for a week or more. Forest visitors camping and engaged in hunting or other recreational activities are not at risk of being cited or having their property considered abandoned after 72 hours. Current Forest Service regulation allows for a Forest user to camp and occupy a site up to 14 days in a 30-day period, and that policy will not change. No abandonment procedures will commence until a site has been occupied for 14 days in a 30-day period, even if the site is left unattended for 72 hours or more within the 14-day timeframe.

I want to assure you that the Forest Service is not implementing any new rules or policies for abandoned property on Federal lands. The Agency has the authority, in our Federal regulations, to remove abandoned property. On rare occasions, when necessary, our Law Enforcement Officers use this authority primarily to protect the public from hazards and to keep the Forest from becoming a dumping ground for unwanted property. For instance, there was a recent case in which a prescribed burn on the Coconino National Forest had to be modified because an abandoned vehicle was in the planned burn area.

Before any property is removed from the National Forests, we make every effort to contact the owner. Any action to remove abandoned property from the National Forests is always coordinated with local law enforcement officials. Most of these removals occur after our Law Enforcement Officers receive complaints from citizens about abandoned property that is posing a safety risk or blocking access for other Forest users.

Our long-standing and close partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department ensures first-rate wildlife management and hunting opportunities on the National Forests in Arizona. Our Southwestern Regional Forester and Forest Supervisors in Arizona are working closely with Arizona Game and Fish officials to clarify any confusion or concern in the hunting community regarding this issue. We are continuing to meet with Arizona Game and Fish personnel on the



ground and are seeking a meeting with the Coconino County Sheriff to pursue mutual resolution of the issues. We are also rescheduling the annual Arizona Game and Fish coordination meeting, which was unfortunately cancelled earlier in October.

Again, thank you for writing. We are committed to resolving this miscommunication in a collaborative way with our partners in Arizona to ensure quality and safe hunting and recreation experiences for all Forest users.

Sincerely,



THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief

