



To the Honorable Governor Greg Gianforte,  
Helena, MT 59620

March 27, 2024

Like most Montanans, we were dismayed and concerned to hear the announcement about the pending closure of the Pyramid Mill in Seeley Lake. Our collaborative is involved in supporting forest management practices which protect and enhance our public resources, and support a healthy timber industry. The news about the Pyramid closure caused us to consider additional steps our state could take to address some of the many challenges faced by the timber industry, which is so vitally important to our state.

We recognize there are special challenges in the Seeley Lake community which limit the availability of workforce housing, but we still find it a matter of great concern that many companies in all phases of the timber industry are struggling to survive and prosper.

It seems that recruiting and retaining skilled workers is a challenge many employers face today, in the timber industry as well as a host of other industries. We encourage you to take steps to create an ambitious and well-funded program to attract and train people to fill the many jobs in industries where trained workers are in short supply.

You are no doubt aware of the Idaho job training program called "Career Ready Students" as well as other ambitious programs in other states. We believe programs such as this provide many benefits to the students and their families, and also to the health and prosperity of our communities.

Today our state and nation have ambitious goals to treat and reduce fire risk on extensive areas of our public lands. These efforts are slowed by chronic shortages of not just mill workers, loggers, equipment operators, and truck drivers, but also people trained to prepare and analyze forest projects for implementation. Training more workers in these fields would directly improve our ability to reduce fire risk around communities.

Another major benefit of an increase in training opportunities could be to reduce chronic unemployment in a variety of underserved communities around the state, by developing programs designed around the special challenges some of these communities face.

The board members of the KFSC are united in asking you to invest in our young people and our vital industries, with a major initiative to increase job training opportunities.

The Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Collaborative was founded in 2006. Our mission is to help craft solutions for public lands management by representing diverse values and providing a venue for productive, inclusive conversations between the Forest Service and the community. Our stakeholders' collaborative is comprised of a diverse community of forest users, hunters, hikers, loggers, timber industry representatives, conservationists, business owners, local governments, educators, and citizens at large. You can view our website at <https://www.kootenaifuture.org/>

Thank you for your consideration,

*Tim Dougherty*, Co-chair of KFSC

*Doug Ferrell*, Co-chair of KFSC

cc: Brendan Beatty, Director of the Mt Dept of Revenue  
Amanda Kaster, Director of the Mt Dept of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Sarah Swanson, Director of the Mt Dept of Labor and Industry