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February 11, 2020

The Honorable James E. Hubbard
Under Secretary for Natural Resources & Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Under Secretary Hubbard,

I have strong concerns about an apparent instance of climate censorship during a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) environmental review.

Recent news reports described an incident where the USFS published in the federal register two notices of intent (NOI) to prepare a draft environmental impact statement for new oil and gas leasing in Texas. According to the reports, the first federal register notice, published on August 26, included references to climate change and greenhouse gasses. However, a new notice regarding the same draft environmental impact statement published the very next day did not contain the references to climate change and greenhouse emissions.

In an email exchange, a USDA employee stated that a deputy official in the USFS had requested the removal of all references to climate and greenhouse gasses in the notice. A USFS employee wrote, "The Deputy who is reviewing the NOI requested every reference to 'climate' and 'greenhouse gasses' be removed. We did."

Interfering with the professional and impartial assessments of government officials obstructs important analysis that is needed to ensure environmental concerns are addressed.

This is not the first time I have questioned the USDA's censorship of climate change work. I have repeatedly raised concerns about this Administration's attempts to suppress science and interfere with the professional judgment of experts. At a time when we are seeing dramatic impacts of the climate crisis across the country, the USDA's failure to acknowledge this threat puts farmers and families at risk. Please answer the following questions no later than February 25, 2020:

- 1) Who made the decision to remove references to "climate change" and "greenhouse gasses" from the August 27, 2019 Forest Service federal register notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement? (hereinafter "the notice").
- 2) Why were references to "climate change" and "greenhouse gasses" removed from the notice?
- 3) Will the USFS consider climate change and greenhouse gasses in the draft environmental impact statement it is preparing pursuant to the notice?

- 4) Have USFS employees been instructed or directed not to consider climate change or not to use the term climate change or related terms in other instances? Please list any such instances.
- 5) Are there any other instances in which USFS or other USDA officials have given direction to suppress, undermine or not complete assessments of climate change or greenhouse gasses? Please list any such instances.
- 6) Does the USFS consider climate change or greenhouse gasses in environmental impact statements it prepares?

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member