

## Freudenthal blasts feds for lack of forest funding

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Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal gives his state of the state speech in the House of Representatives Monday morning at the Wyoming State Capitol in Cheyenne. (Dan Cepeda, Star-Tribune)

By BEN NEARY

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CHEYENNE -- Gov. Dave Freudenthal has written to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture saying he's indignant that the federal agency has excluded national forests in Wyoming from federal economic stimulus funding.

Freudenthal wrote Wednesday to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, saying he doubts that most people in Washington can find Wyoming on the map, no less understand the dire natural resource issues facing the state.

"I am especially disconcerted by the fact that while Wyoming has not received a single dollar in Forest Service stimulus allocations, our neighboring states have combined received about \$170 million to address resources issues, which are remarkably similar to those that exist in Wyoming," Freudenthal wrote.

Vilsack early this month announced \$228 million in economic stimulus money would be used for road projects and watershed restoration projects in national forests in 31 other states. He said then that the Forest Service is receiving a total of \$1.15 billion in economic stimulus funding.

Freudenthal asked Vilsack to give Wyoming \$26.5 million for projects to address wildfire concerns and beetle infestations. The governor stated he believes that more than \$500 million in Forest Service stimulus funds remain unallocated.

"As I have previously stated, the current bark beetle epidemic does not stop at the state line, nor do other resource concerns and needs," Freudenthal wrote.

Sierra Hellstrom, spokeswoman with the Intermountain Region office of the U.S. Forest Service in Ogden, Utah, said Wednesday that her office hadn't seen Freudenthal's letter and couldn't respond to it immediately.

Gregory Keeley, spokesman for Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., said the senator believes the stimulus package has been rushed and fundamentally flawed from the start.

"Unfortunately he expects to see a series of missteps and wasteful spending as the funds are distributed by Washington bureaucrats," Keeley said.