



**National Rural Electric  
Cooperative Association**

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Jo Ann Emerson  
Chief Executive Officer

May 20, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop:

I write in support of H.R. 2358, the Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act of 2015, introduced by Representatives Ryan Zinke and Kurt Schrader. This common-sense legislation provides opportunities for electric cooperatives to better enhance safety and ensure the delivery of affordable, reliable electricity to their members.

As you know, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association is the national service organization that represents the nation's more than 900 private, not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives, which provide service to 42 million people in 47 states. Rural electric cooperatives across the country are often located in areas on or near public lands. Therefore, moving electricity from generation facilities to customers frequently requires transmission lines to cross land that is federally managed. Access to these lines is essential to perform routine maintenance, upgrades, and equipment replacement. Further, vegetation management is of utmost importance to meet state and federal safety requirements and to ensure electric reliability for our member-owners.

The Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act would give electric utilities more consistent procedures and a streamlined process in order to better manage utility rights of way. The bill allows sensible procedures that would cut through federal bureaucratic red tape and reduce delays that currently impede our ability to adequately manage dangerous vegetative overgrowth in existing utility rights of way. Such delays not only add to the costs our electric consumers pay for their electricity, but present a major threat to human safety, wildlife habitat, and the reliable delivery of electricity.

In short, the Zinke-Schrader bill would be a useful tool for allowing prompt, critical access to utility rights of way and responding to emergency conditions to help prevent wildfire, power outages, and threats to the electric grid. We urge the committee to swiftly move forward on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Ann Emerson".

Jo Ann Emerson  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association