



Testimony of Ranking Member Bruce Westerman
House Agriculture Committee Member Day Hearing
May 18, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Scott, and Ranking Member Thompson for the opportunity to testify today. As Ranking Member of the House Committee on Natural Resources, I enjoy working closely with you both on our mutual goals of conserving the environment and ensuring the prosperity of rural America.

Mr. Chairman, our nation is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. We have the responsibility to manage and utilize these resources in ways that allow them to flourish for future generations. I firmly believe that the healthiest, most resilient environment is one which scientifically balances both the needs of the land with the needs of the people living connected to the land. True conservation utilizes innovative new approaches to maximize utility and access to our lands, while ensuring their long-term health.

One piece of bipartisan legislation that exemplifies these principles of conservation and innovation is H.R. 2639, the “Trillion Trees Act,” which I re-introduced this past April. The bill is endorsed by over 50 stakeholder organizations and currently has 96 bipartisan cosponsors. My bill would improve our nation’s forestlands and establish the U.S. as a leader of the global One Trillion Trees Initiative by incentivizing improved regeneration, management, and utilization of our forests.

Studies show planting and restoring one trillion trees globally would sequester 205 gigatons of carbon, an amount equivalent to two-thirds of all the carbon remaining in the atmosphere. We currently have over 400 parts per million of carbon in the atmosphere, and the American people are demanding that Congress take practical action to address this issue. Natural climate solutions like the Trillion Trees Act must be our future as we seek commonsense, innovative ways to address atmospheric carbon.

House Natural Resources Republicans held forum on the bill in celebration of Arbor Day, where representatives from Walmart, the

National Wildlife Federation, the National Alliance of Forest Owners, and University of Idaho testified in strong support of the bill. During this Forum, witnesses highlighted the both the economic and carbon-storing benefits of sustainable forest products and global reforestation initiatives. As this Committee works to identify practical, pro-growth carbon solutions, I hope that the House Agriculture Committee will hold an official hearing on the “Trillion Trees Act.”

Additionally, I would like to highlight several bills which were included in the “Trillion Trees Act,” but were also introduced as stand-alone pieces of legislation referred to this Committee:

The first is H.R. 2477, the “Urban Forests Act of 2021,” a bipartisan bill introduced by Representative Malliotakis (*Mal-e-o-tah-kiss*). Urban forests are important sources of carbon sequestration and sequestered nearly 130 million metric tons of carbon in 2018. The Urban Forests Act of 2021 would enhance and maintain these forests while helping create new jobs focused on new wood products and forest management.

Next, H.R. 2500, the “Forest TECH Improvement Act,” introduced by Representative Moore of Utah, aims to improve the pace and scale of reforestation efforts via new technologies like drones and advanced GIS mapping technologies.

Third, H.R. 2526, the “SOS for Seedlings Act,” introduced by Representative Bentz, addresses the significant U.S. seedling shortage by providing critical direction to the U.S. Forest Service to develop a comprehensive seedling strategy and increasing resources for Federal, State, Tribal, local and private nurseries. If the United States is to both become a global leader in reforestation and address the reforestation needs driven by catastrophic wildfire, we must dramatically scale up our current U.S. nursery capacity.

Last, but not least, is H.R. 2581, the “BIOCHAR Act,” introduced by Representative Herrell. Biochar is an emerging carbon sequestration tool with exciting potential to sequester carbon for hundreds of years. Biochar, which is produced by burning biomass in the absence of oxygen, also has a litany of other environmental benefits ranging from

improved forest health and resiliency, agricultural productivity, environmental remediation, water quality improvement and retention, and improved soil health. This bill would create a new demonstration projects for biochar to improve its commercialization as well as new applied research and development programs to test its applicability in a variety of sectors.

To quote something Ranking Member Thompson frequently says, “The 2018 Farm Bill was the greenest Farm Bill in history.” I believe that the inclusion of the Trillion Trees Act and the additional bills I mentioned can help make the 2023 Farm Bill even greener and provide a benefit to both the environment and the economy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. As Ranking Member of the Natural Resources Committee, I am committed to working with you all to advance meaningful, bipartisan conservation and forestry legislation that will improve the lives of Americans across the nation. Thank you, and I yield back.