

Agriculture Committee Member Day
Congressman Bruce Westerman
Talking Points
December 6, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's important Agriculture Committee Member Day Hearing. I appreciate the work that you are doing to support farmers, foresters, ranchers, and rural America.

Agriculture and Arkansas are synonymous. My home state has a wide array of agricultural commodities and agriculture claims first place for the Natural State's largest industry. While each segment of the industry is important to feed, fuel, and clothe Americans across the country, I'd like to talk to you today about one specific sector, and you can probably guess what it is.

I am proud to hold the title of the only licensed forester in Congress, and I enjoy talking about forestry and trees at any and every opportunity. I appreciate the work that the Agriculture Committee has done to address forestry issues, promote active forest management, and improve the health of our forests.

As your committee continues the important work of crafting the Farm Bill, I want to share a few priorities with you all that, in my opinion, will ensure the strongest and most comprehensive forestry title in the Farm Bill possible.

It's no secret that I'm passionate about conserving trees, particularly when it comes to national treasures like our Giant Sequoias. As you know, nearly one-fifth of all Giant Sequoias were destroyed in catastrophic wildfires in 2020 and 2021. That has prompted me to work closely with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to introduce the Save Our Sequoias (SOS) Act. SOS

provides a bipartisan and comprehensive response to address imminent threats facing the iconic Giant Sequoias.

I believe this bill is bigger than just Sequoias, rather it provides a framework for forest management bills to come. It's not every day that you see such powerful support on both sides of the aisle for a bill here in D.C., and I'm proud to be leading this legislation alongside my California colleagues.

I'd like to highlight another important tool to improve forest health: biochar. For those who may not be familiar with biochar, it is made by burning feedstock like low-value wood products or chicken litter in the absence of oxygen, also known as pyrolysis. What's special about biochar is that it is essentially a pure form of carbon. Biochar can sequester carbon for hundreds or even thousands of years.

This ancient technique may be the solution to solving one of our most pressing modern problems. Biochar can serve as a new market that can make removing low-value excess materials from our federal forests economical. Not only would this improve forest health, but biochar could then be used as a soil additive to retain moisture and nutrients and neutralize acidity.

I plan to re-introduce bipartisan legislation shortly that will unleash this emerging technology to help it reach its full environmental and agricultural potential. This bill directs our federal land management agencies to establish biochar demonstration projects in each Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management region across the nation.

I'm excited about the potential that biochar has to incentivize forest management and improve forest health, and I urge you to incorporate it into the Farm Bill.

Another issue that I would like to see addressed in the Farm Bill is reversing the *Cottonwood* decision. You all know that *Cottonwood* presents unnecessary, unworkable, and costly bureaucratic hurdles that empower environmental litigants with additional weapons to delay or cancel land and forest management projects. We need to provide a full, permanent fix to the misguided 2015 *Cottonwood* decision that has significantly hampered responsible forest management in many of our Western states. We partially fixed this issue in the FY2018 Omnibus, however that fix expired this March. I urge the Ag Committee to include the Forest Information Reform (FIR) Act in the upcoming Farm Bill, which would resolve this issue, fully and permanently.

Another critical tool in confronting our forest health and wildfire crisis is Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). While State GNA projects have flourished, Tribes and counties have not been given the same authority that states have to retain timber receipts for use on additional conservation and restoration work. This removes a significant incentive to partner on these projects. My colleague on the Natural Resources Committee, Representative Fulcher, introduced legislation, the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbor Authority Act, a bipartisan effort that allows Tribes and counties to fully participate in the Good Neighbor Authority program. I urge you to prioritize this in the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization.

Throughout my time in Congress, I have been proud to lead the Trillion Trees Act, a bipartisan proposal that seeks to establish the United States as a global leader of the One Trillion

Trees Initiative. This bill seeks to responsibly grow more trees, use more wood, and store more carbon, all with a special focus on responsible management of our forests.

Scientific studies have shown that planting 1 trillion new trees globally would sequester 205 gigatons of carbon, an amount equivalent to two-thirds of all man-made emissions since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

Trees are one of the best tools we have to pull carbon out of the atmosphere, create a healthier and cleaner environment, and create new jobs. Responsibly growing more timber will yield immense economic and environmental benefits.

As Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, I have continued to stress that a healthy environment and a strong economy are not mutually exclusive. And as a forester, I don't believe there is any greater example of this truth than the responsible utilization of timber and wood products that comes

from the wise stewardship of our forests. The Trillion Trees Act accomplishes these goals through scientifically managing our forests to mitigate catastrophic wildfires, and incentivizing the use of wood products as renewable resources provides a comprehensive, practical solution to the climate issues we're facing today.

In closing, I encourage you all to include policies that acknowledge that healthy and productive federal, state, and private forests are a vital part of rural communities. Their proper management provides us with many benefits, both environmental and economical. We have the opportunity in this Farm Bill to advance important solutions to better our forests, which will in turn, better our environment and our economy. I believe the solutions I have laid out in this testimony should be a part of the broader effort to comprehensively reform our forest

management practices so we can increase the pace and scale of responsible forest management.

I appreciate the great working relationship I have enjoyed with the Ag Committee, and look forward to continued collaboration to ensure our forests are managed efficiently and effectively for the betterment of the nation. Thank you and I yield back.