

## Testimony of Congressman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-05)

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Member Hearing on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2018  
Tuesday, February 28, 2017

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum:

Thank you for holding this session today. As a member of the Natural Resources Committee and as Vice Chair of the Agriculture Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on funding and policy decisions made in this important subcommittee.

By way of background, my district makes up 22 percent of the landmass of Pennsylvania and is among the most rural districts east of the Mississippi River. Agriculture, oil and gas production, manufacturing, mining and timbering are among our top economic drivers throughout the region. The region is also home to the world’s first commercial oil well – Drake’s Well in Titusville, Pennsylvania - and consequently the birth of the petroleum industry in 1859. Because of this storied history, the Oil Region National Heritage Area, as recognized by the National Park Service, was established in 2004. With this in mind, I’d like to first express my great support for heritage areas. It is important that we continue to recognize the history of areas such as the Oil Region that directly helped to shape our nation, as well as build our communities.

It is also in this region of northwestern Pennsylvania that the Commonwealth’s only national forest is located. Four of my counties – Warren, Forest, Elk and McKean - make up the Allegheny National Forest, where we long have had energy production, high-value timbering and recreation that is second to none.

As this subcommittee knows well, wildfire costs have skyrocketed in the past two decades, burning up 6.7 million acres per year on average since 2000. In addition to the significant challenges of firefighting itself, national forests around the nation continue to have great difficulties performing essential activities due to budget cuts as a result of fire borrowing. Accordingly, in the Allegheny, like most every national forest, we routinely lose funding, staff and resources each year during the wildfire season. This directly diminishes the local Forest Service’s ability to manage the ANF, allow for needed timbering and pursue other projects.

Like many national forest regions in the West, the lack of timbering in the ANF directly undermines our local economy, as well as my four counties that lose out on funding for essential services. We can do much more harvesting in the Allegheny National Forest but that won’t happen without the necessary funding or direction from Congress.

In order to support management activities and especially timbering in national forests, I request robust funding for the National Forest System (NFS). I also urge full funding for Forest Products & Timber Sales, Capital Improvement & Maintenance, and Forest Roads. Further, I request that the Committee include report language calling for the Forest Service to specifically meet each forest plan's harvesting levels. Forests are living and breathing ecosystems that need to be managed. And providing necessary funding for such management activities – including timbering, prescribed burns and thinnings – is essential for forest health and in order to help prevent wildfires.

Regarding other management activities, the Forest Service is doing amazing work on invasive species, diseases and forest health. And I've seen this firsthand at the Warren research lab, located in my district. This work is fundamental in helping to not only deal with existing forest health problems, but to also get in front of emerging ones before they exacerbate and become greater threats. With this in mind, I request much needed funding for Forest Service research activities, specifically for Forest & Rangeland Research, as well as for State & Private Forestry. Similarly, we must also provide necessary resources for the Fish & Wildlife Service's State & Tribal Wildlife Grants for the purpose of insect, disease and invasive plant research. This program directly support grants to the states for species conservation, in order to help prevent listings under the Endangered Species Act.

Finally, I would like to register my great support for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program as well as Secure Rural Schools. Though its authorization is currently expired, Secure Rural Schools has been a critical lifeline for national forest counties in providing essential services because of greatly reduced timbering in national forests since the early 1990s.

With that, I thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony to the committee. And I look forward to working with you as the Appropriations process continues to move forward for Fiscal Year 2018.