



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**U.S. Forest Service FY 2018 Budget Hearing
May 25, 2017
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Good morning. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished full committee chairman, my colleagues, our witnesses, and the audience. Today is a special occasion for the Interior Subcommittee. We have the Secretary of Agriculture, the Honorable Sonny Perdue, as well as the Chief of the Forest Service, Mr. Tom Tidwell, testifying before us.

My staff reviewed the Committee's hearing records as far back as the 1960s and found no mention of the Secretary of Agriculture appearing before the Subcommittee on Forest Service issues. I understand your staff jogged the memories of long-time USDA employees, and no one could remember it happening either.

As we break new ground today, Secretary Perdue and Chief Tidwell, we are pleased and honored to have you both with us. We look forward to hearing from you on the fiscal year 2018 budget request for the Forest Service.

The President's fiscal year 2018 budget request is a significant departure from the last several fiscal years with its proposed overall reduction of \$900 million – 16 percent – below the fiscal year 2017 enacted level for Forest Service programs. And again we have a budget request in which more than 50 percent of the Service's budget is dedicated to fighting fires. We will have many questions about these cuts and their effects on operations, staffing, and programs.

In particular, this Subcommittee continues to be concerned about the cost of fighting wildfires and the effect it has on other Forest Service budgets, programs, and management. I would like to thank you, Chief Tidwell, for the Administration's efforts over the past several years to change the way we budget for fires. I also thank Congressman Simpson for keeping the pressure on Congress to address the issue.

While firefighting costs seem to dominate most discussions about the Forest Service, there are numerous other issues, including aviation management, law enforcement, land acquisition, and basic budgeting and program management, among others, that need to be attended to. As I have said before, the Service must demonstrate that it is accountable, transparent, and able to improve the condition of our national forests, all while managing unpredictable fire seasons. This is not an easy task.

Secretary Perdue, we invited you to participate in this hearing, in part, to help you understand the importance of the Forest Service to this Subcommittee, the Department of Agriculture as a whole, and the Nation. Healthy, productive national forests provide quality timber and other forest products; they clean our air and water; provide recreational opportunities; and enhance the natural beauty of our country. We understand the challenges facing our national forests and the statutes under which they are managed. However, I believe our national forests need a renewed focus on their health and productivity. As Secretary, you can help with that, and I ask you to consider making forest management one of your priorities.

For the past one and a half years, the Subcommittee, along with our Senate counterparts, has been investigating the Forest Service's accounting, budget, and management practices. We found some areas where improvements were needed. Some of these needed to be addressed by Congress. Others could be addressed by the Service.

In the fiscal year 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act, we: imposed fiscal year limits on most Forest Service accounts; directed the Service to standardize its budgeting across the agency; directed the Service to reduce printing expenditures; increased oversight of the Service by the Department's budget office; and required more detailed budget requests in the future.

Chief, we appreciate the dedication, creativity, and responsiveness of your budget staff. They are working long hours without complaint to address our concerns and make the Forest Service more accountable, effective, and transparent.

The Subcommittee is serious about the need for improvements in your accounting, budgeting, and management practices. They will be especially important if we see large reductions to the Service's budget. We must ensure we are getting the absolute most out of every taxpayer dollar invested in the national forests. We pledge to work with you and hope that you also will pledge to work with us.

Secretary Perdue and Chief Tidwell, I thank you and the entire Forest Service staff for your work to care for the Nation's forests. We know that all of you care deeply for our forests and the communities that depend on them.

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