

**Testimony of Congressman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-05)**  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Member Hearing on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2020  
March 27, 2019

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon to share my priorities for the Interior Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2020. The agencies and programs under this subcommittee’s jurisdiction are critically important in my district and many other regions around the nation.

My district makes up 22% of Pennsylvania’s landmass and is one of the most rural districts east of the Mississippi River. Agriculture, oil and gas production, forest products, mining, manufacturing and recreation have long been among our top economic drivers in the region. Oil and gas production, in particular, has had a long history in northwestern Pennsylvania; and in fact, this is where the modern petroleum industry began in 1859. Due to this history and its impact on America, Congress created the Oil Region National Heritage Area in 2004. With this in mind, I’d first like to register my support for our national heritage areas and request full funding for Fiscal Year 2020.

My district is also home to Pennsylvania’s only national forest, the Allegheny, which encompasses four counties. The ANF is truly unique within the national forest system. Since the forest was created in 1923, the ANF is truly multiple-use as we have energy production, timber harvesting, essential forest management and a variety of recreational opportunities.

As this Committee well knows, the Forest Service and national forest counties have had significant challenges with skyrocketing wildfire costs over the past twenty years. Along with the great difficulties and destruction caused by wildfires, funding transfers have had great impacts on forests systemwide as funding, personnel and resources are shifted away from essential management activities. Lower funding for these accounts undermines our ability to effectively manage our forests and frequently results in lost revenue to our counties when timber sales decline. I am thankful for the funding fix legislated by Congress last year and thank you for your support.

While the fire fix is important, I believe there is much more we can do to support the Forest Service through funding and direction from Congress. In order to support management activities, and especially timbering in national forests, I request full funding for the National Forest System (NFS), as well as for Forest Products & Timber Sales, Capital Improvement & Maintenance, and Forest Roads, and the Landscape-Scale Restoration program. Last year, the Forest Service sold 3.1 billion board feet of timber. While this is an increase of nearly 10% versus 2017, this is just over half the board feet that forest plans currently permit. As in previous years, I request that the Committee includes language calling for each forest to reach its recommended harvesting levels. By encouraging more timbering where it makes sense and focusing on our most fire-prone areas, we can help to reduce fire fuels and better manage our national forests.

In addition to this management, I strongly support the great work the Forest Service performs relating to invasive species, diseases and forest health. As such, I request much needed funding for Forest Service research activities, specifically for Forest & Rangeland Research, as well as for State & Private Forestry.

I would like to register my support for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program. This program provides support to counties with tax-exempt federal lands by offsetting lost tax revenue. I fully support this program and request that the Subcommittee fully funds this important program.

Finally, I would like to express my support for the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Fund pilot program. Abandoned Mine Lands have caused considerable environmental challenges throughout Appalachia for generations. While we have made significant strides in restoring these lands since 1977, much more work needs to be done. The Office of Surface Mining estimates that unfunded liabilities of abandoned mine lands across the nation is at least \$10 billion, with more than half of these needs in Pennsylvania. To supplement current AML funding, Congress has appropriated discretionary pilot funds over the past few years to help states with the greatest needs. I request that the Subcommittee continue this support and fully fund the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund pilot program – along with efforts to reclaim our historic abandoned mine lands.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony to the committee. I look forward to working with you as the Appropriations process continues to move forward for Fiscal Year 2020.