

Testimony of Congressman Glenn 'GT' Thompson (PA-15)

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies

Member Hearing on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021

March 10, 2020

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

Thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning to share my priorities for the Interior Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2021. The agencies and programs under this subcommittee's jurisdiction are critically important in my district and many others around the nation.

My congressional district makes up roughly 23 percent of the landmass of Pennsylvania and is one of the most rural districts east of the Mississippi River. For generations, agriculture, forest products, oil and gas production, mining, manufacturing and recreation have been among the top economic drivers in the region – all of which rely on access to and stewardship of our natural resources.

Oil and gas production, in particular, has a long and storied history in northwestern Pennsylvania. When Colonel Edwin Drake drilled the world's first commercially successful oil well in 1859, it established Titusville, Pennsylvania as the birthplace of the modern petroleum industry.

Because of this history and its worldwide impact, Congress designated the Oil Region National Heritage Area in 2004. While I much appreciate the extension of the Oil Region heritage area in last year's omnibus, I am hopeful we can find a longer-term authorization for it and for the many other designated areas which support history education and benefit local communities.

With that, I support full funding for the National Heritage Area program for FY2021.

Also in the region, my district is home to Pennsylvania's only national forest – the Allegheny – which encompasses four counties and nearly 500,000 acres.

The ANF is truly unique among our national forests. With forest management, timber harvesting, energy production and a variety of recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors alike, the ANF is an economic engine of northwestern Pennsylvania.

Thankfully, we have not had the wildfire challenges many other forests and rural communities have had around the nation – but we have continued to experience budgetary difficulties over the years due to wildfire. I've traveled to the West and have seen this devastation firsthand and the important work that the Forest Service and others continue to do in response.

As this Subcommittee begins work on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021, I again strongly encourage you to provide funding and resources to help the Forest Service to do more active management in order to encourage forest health and prevent wildfires.

Specifically, I request full funding for the National Forest System (NFS); as well as increased funding for Forest Products & Timber Sales and Capital Improvement & Maintenance-Roads.

I would also like to register my support for Wildland Hazardous Fuels Reduction, the Landscape-Scale Restoration program; and the various forest management tools we've provided the Forest Service through the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills.

Additionally, the Forest Service is still not reaching the recommended timber harvesting goals across the system. As in previous years, I request that the Committee includes language calling for each forest to reach those recommended harvesting levels.

By encouraging more harvesting where it makes sense and focusing it on our most fire-prone areas, we can help to reduce fuel load, better manage our forests and hopefully reduce the instances and severity of wildfire.

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

To proactively help prevent species from listing under the ESA, I also request continued funding for Fish & Wildlife Service's State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for your support of the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Fund pilot program we've funded the past few years.

Since the creation of SMCRA in 1977, we've come a long way in cleaning up our historic abandoned mine lands throughout the nation. Reclaimed mines generate clean water, healthy soils and important economic development in the short and long term.

Although we have made so much progress over the last forty years, much more work remains in restoring these lands that were mined prior to 1977. For example, 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 alone.

To supplement current AML funding, Congress has appropriated discretionary funds over the past few years to help states with the greatest needs. I request that the Subcommittee continue this and fully fund the AML pilot program.

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.