

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2023

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
2084 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify to your Committee about a few issues of great importance to me. Specifically, I want to address funding for State and Volunteer Fire assistance, the Legacy Roads and Trails program, and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

The first programs I want to speak about are the **State and Volunteer Fire Capacity Programs**, previously known as the State and Volunteer Fire Assistance Programs. Wildfires across my district and the country have become bigger and more intense in recent years. In 2022, 69,000 wildland fires burned more than 7.5 million acres and resulted in more than \$4 billion in state and federal suppression expenditures. These programs are essential for keeping communities in my district and across the country safe.

The State Fire Capacity program helps state and local fire departments respond to wildland fires and with conducting land management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. It funds training for state and local responders who are often first to arrive at a wildland fire, as well as equip them with the tools they need to put wildland fires out efficiently and safely.

The Volunteer Fire Capacity program provides support to volunteer fire departments protecting communities with populations of 10,000 or fewer residents. Fire departments protecting smaller communities often lack the necessary resources and rely more on volunteer staffing compared to departments protecting communities with larger populations. Increasing funding and capacity for volunteer fire departments is paramount because they are the first responders to more than 80% of wildland fires – whether on state, federal or private lands.

I am leading a bipartisan letter on these programs with Congressman Mike Bost and respectfully ask the Committee to fund the State Fire Capacity program at \$79 million and the Volunteer Fire Capacity program at \$22 million for FY24.

Next, I want to speak about a program that is near and dear to my heart, the US Forest Service's **Legacy Roads and Trails** program. This program leverages public and private funding to address water quality and access for threatened and endangered species like the Chinook salmon, bull trout, and steelhead.

It was created in 2008 because the general Forest Service road maintenance budget was unable to address the sheer volume of blocked culverts, landslides and washouts which were impacting water quality and access for threatened and endangered species. The need for funding remains great today. The Forest Service has identified a backlog of over \$4.4 billion in deferred maintenance for its network of over 370,000 miles of roads, hundreds of high priority culvert projects, and over \$600 million for priority watershed restoration projects in need of restoration.

Let's continue to implement the LRT program in line with its purpose, to "protect or improve water quality in drinking water source areas, restore habitat of threatened or endangered fish or wildlife". Few programs deliver the trifecta of environmental, recreational, and economic benefits like Legacy Roads and Trails, so I respectfully request that the Committee provide \$100 million for this program.

Also, I want to speak about the Forest Service's **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program** (CFLRP), which funds science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes, in Western fire prone states such as my home state, and across the country. CFLRP leverages national, local, and private resources to fund collaborative, community-based forest management that restores National Forest System lands. It improves forest health, builds wildfire resilience, reduces management costs, brings local stakeholders together to seek solutions, and achieves ecological and watershed health goals. This program also supports rural communities by encouraging the utilization of forest restoration by-products to offset treatment costs, benefit local rural economies, support forest sector jobs and improve forest health.

My district contains many areas identified as the most at-risk from catastrophic wildfire in the nation. In North Central Washington, CFLRP funds could be utilized to implement strategic fuels treatments and ecosystem restoration and resilience projects to reduce the risk of wildfire and other disturbances to help protect lives, communities, ecosystems, assets and working forests. With sufficient funding, programs like CFLRP, which have a diverse range of benefits, including - wildfire risk reduction, reforestation, job creation, and wildlife habitat restoration - can serve as models for the critical restoration of forest landscapes across the country. I urge you to support this vital program by providing full funding for CFLRP in Fiscal Year 2024.

I sincerely thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on a few issues of critical importance to my constituents. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kim Schrier".

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress