

CONGRESSWOMAN YOUNG KIM
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2023 – 11:30-12:00 PM ET
LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 1324

YK STATEMENT

Thank you, Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Grijalva, for this opportunity to speak today before the Committee.

I represent California's 40th District, which includes parts of Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties in Southern California. My district includes several canyon communities and the Cleveland National Forest's Trabuco District.

I want to take the opportunity to talk about trail maintenance challenges impacting public lands in my district, the need to improve public-private coordination on wildfire technology modernization, and finally, my support for the Compacts of Free Association, or COFA.

In the Cleveland National Forest's Trabuco District, the 2018 Holy Jim Fire forced shutdowns across several popular trails, and these trails remain closed due to persistent erosion and infrastructure-related concerns.

According to the Trabuco District Forest Service rangers, there are only three non-fire Forest Service personnel in the field and seven to eight trail volunteers that actively manage trails across 138,971 acres of the Trabuco area.

National Forests with the most urgent trail and infrastructure maintenance needs must have adequate funding for staffing and resources. Unfortunately, it is not clear how Federal land management agencies have prioritized and allocated funding for maintenance activities. This is a key concern for my constituents in the Canyon Communities.

I was pleased to see language I requested included in the FY24 Interior Appropriations Bill to direct the Forest Service to prioritize funding for trails shut down by wildfires in the last five years with high visitation rates.

I thank the Chairman and his staff for working with me on this language and for continuing to work with me on draft legislation to expedite trail and campground restoration in the National Forest System.

I also want to bring up another one of my priorities regarding wildfire technology. Federal land management agencies do not have a streamlined process for assessing and deploying innovative wildfire technologies. Meanwhile, private entities are developing innovative technologies to fight wildfires, but they often lack the means to test their technologies at-scale, in real time.

In June, I introduced H.R. 4235, the Wildfire Technology Demonstration, Evaluation, Modernization, and Optimization, or Wildfire Technology DEMO Act. It creates a 4-year pilot program allowing private entities developing wildfire technologies to partner with Federal land management agencies and test their technologies alongside hazardous fuels mitigation activities and training.

Some of these next-generation technologies include AI-enabled and thermal cameras to track wildfires, virtual reality simulations for firefighting training, and upgraded firefighting aircraft.

This bill is a win-win for private entities looking to test their equipment and federal land management agencies working to

deploy the best technologies to help first responders address wildfires.

I am excited that it will be considered in a hearing this month. Southern California is at the forefront of wildfire technology innovation, and I am thrilled that Air and Wildland Division Chief, Jim Topoleski, from San Bernardino County Fire Protection District will be testifying at this hearing.

Finally, I want to express support for renewing the Compacts Of Free Association, or COFA. The COFA agreements with Micronesia and the Marshall Islands have expired. These agreements provide economic assistance, certain federal benefits for their citizens, and allow the U.S. to maintain a military presence in these countries. Failing to renew these agreements will have devastating consequences on our strategic posture in the Indo Pacific given the Chinese Communist Party's malign influence in the Pacific Islands. Congress must act to renew these agreements.

Thank you to the Chairman and your staff for the opportunity to share my priorities. I look forward to the good work that will continue to come out of this Committee and appreciate our partnership.