

Questions for the Record by Republican Members

Questions from Representative Paul Cook

- 1. What can be done by the federal government and Congress to help reduce the size and intensity of these catastrophic wildfires?**

Response: Dense undergrowth, insect infestation, invasive species, and disease adversely impact the Nation's forests, rangelands and watersheds, and contribute to increased wildfire risk to surrounding communities. Active management of timber and vegetation is necessary to combat these threats, save lives, and protect property. The Administration proposes a package of forest management legislative reforms coupled with a strong 2020 budget to kick start a solution to this serious risk. The proposed legislation would provide categorical exclusions on national forest lands for active forest management, including the ability to harvest dead, dying, or damaged trees as well as proactive fuels management, including the use of fuel breaks. These changes are much needed to help reduce fire risk, improve forest health, minimize after fire impacts, prevent re-burn of fire impacted areas, and improve safety for wildland firefighters.

2. What are the current impediments to healthy forest management and what would you recommend Congress do to legislatively address this crisis?

Response: The Forest Service has more than \$5.2 billion in deferred maintenance on infrastructure that includes over 370,000 miles of roads, 13,400 bridges and trails, dams, and both administrative and wildfire facilities that impact every aspect of the Forest Service mission. Addressing this deferred maintenance is a critical issue affecting the agency's ability to achieve its mission including wildland fire suppression and actively managing the National Forests. The President's FY 2020 Budget request includes a Public Lands Infrastructure Fund (PLIF) that would provide an allocation of funds for deferred maintenance in the National Forest System. USDA welcomes the opportunity for further discussion with the subcommittee regarding the PLIF proposal to address the agency's deferred maintenance needs.

3. What actions does the Forest Service recommend Congress take to mitigate the growing fuel loads in federal forests?

Response: On March 28th, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior jointly transmitted the Administration's Forest Management legislative reforms package, with a suite of landscape-based categorical exclusions designed to expedite forest and vegetation management projects that will support healthy forests and rangelands and aid in efforts to protect homes and infrastructure from catastrophic wildfires. They include a Categorical Exclusion under NEPA that would allow for managing wildland fuels using prescribed fire. We appreciate the authorities Congress have given us but want to keep working with you to enact additional reforms that and maximize our ability to improve the health of America's forests.