

- I want to thank my democratic friends for convening this hearing to discuss our growing national wildfire crisis.
- After a historically tragic fire year, House Republicans, especially those on this committee, have been urging our friends on the other side of the dais to take action on this dire issue. I am pleased they are doing so here today.
- The poor health of our nation's forests has reached crisis levels. Before our own eyes, we've seen many of our nation's once flourishing forests transform into dead and burned out waste lands.
- 2018 was an especially deadly and destructive year. Wildfires destroyed over 8.8 million acres across the US.
- In my home state of Utah alone, nearly half a million acres burned last year. Over 60% of Utah is federal land, adding even more unique challenges to forest management.
- Tragically, wildfires have also claimed the lives of over 400 Americans in the last 20 years. Just last year an especially deadly fire in California killed 85 people.
- The poor state of many federal forests is an undeniable national emergency. For decades we have failed to properly manage our forests, which has led to hazardous fuels buildup. As a result, these excessive fuel loads are increasing the likelihood of deadly fires.
- We cannot continue to ignore the forest health crisis. The Federal government's current rate, treating a mere 2% of the nearly 80 million acres identified as high risk to wildfire, is not acceptable.

- Litigation and endless analysis force federal land managers to spend 40% of their time and money on bureaucratic processes and “bulletproofing” against the fear of litigation instead of getting real work done on the ground.
- This is a very real problem and we must enact measures to increase the pace and scale of active management across our forest lands.
- This Congress presents a new opportunity for Congress to enact meaningful reforms to bring relief to our western communities.
- It is vital that we empower land management agencies with the tools they need to restore health and resiliency to our forests, while also finding ways to make our rural communities safer from the threat of catastrophic wildfires.
- There are some who unfortunately dismiss or downplay the need for better forest management. They argue that efforts would be better served focusing solely on community protection tools like fire resistant construction and defensible spaces.
- While these are very important public safety tools, they do not negate the need for more proactive management of our forests. They go hand in hand.
- While I am excited to work on important community safety efforts, I must also urge my colleagues to not neglect our responsibility to address the failing health of our nation’s forests.
- For too long we have focused on fire suppression, while ignoring the need to address fire prevention, and year after year, our national wildfire crisis continues to grow.

- Toward that end, yesterday I was proud to join my good friend Congressman Westerman in introducing the “Resilient Federal Forests Act.” I believe this bill provides the types of fire prevention tools needed to restore health to our nation’s forests, while also empowering important community safety efforts.
- This proposal builds upon Congressman Westerman’s House passed legislation from the 115th Congress, and provides real reforms that will help our land managers prevent catastrophic wildfires and stop the horrible tragedies that we are seeing in the west year after year.
- I urge my colleagues to join us in this effort.
- With that, Madame Chair, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to listening to your testimony.