

**Testimony of Congressman John Curtis on:
Aerial Incursion Repercussion (AIR) Safety Act
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands
June 18, 2020**

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for holding a hearing on my bill, the Aerial Incursion Repercussion (AIR) Safety Act. The AIR Safety Act is a simple bill that will have a tremendous impact on wildfire fighting.

When a wildfire breaks out, the FAA sets up Temporary Flight Restrictions, or TFRs, essentially setting up “no-fly zones” around the wildfire. When people fly their personal drones in these TFRs to take pictures and videos of the fire, all aerial firefighting efforts must be grounded until the drone is gone. These incursions waste valuable time and money that could otherwise be used to save lives and property.

For example, in Utah in 2015, a fire in Washington County cost the state nearly \$10 million because of five drones flying within the TFR. During the Lake Fire in California, three planes carrying flame suppressant were unable to drop their cargo on the fire, resulting in an estimated 10 – 15-thousand-dollar cost.

In 2018, during one of the worst fires in my district, all firefighting aircraft had to be grounded as well as three helicopters supporting ground crews because of one drone. Who knows how much quicker these fires could have been contained if the firefighters were able to utilize every tool they have.

The AIR Safety Act directs the Forest Service and BLM to look at the drone incursions over 5 years and determine how much time and money was wasted as well as ways to remove drones and prevent them from interfering in the first place.

I'd like to enter for the record:

- A letter of support from The Wilderness Society.
- A testimony in support of the AIR Safety Act from the National Association of State Foresters.

Given their extensive expertise and experience fighting wildfire, in the future I'd like to propose an amendment to include state foresters in the study, as they will provide valuable feedback and experience. I'm hopeful the AIR Safety Act will soon be considered by this committee at markup and we can do just that.

I'd also like to thank Mr. Huffman for spearheading this effort with me and his commitment to bipartisanship. Thank you for the chance to testify today, I yield my time.