

Opening Statement for Ranking Member Fulcher
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Oversight Hearing on “*Wildfires in a Warming World: Opportunities to Improve
Community Collaboration, Climate Resilience and Workforce Capacity*”
April 29, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today, we meet to discuss an issue of dire importance. Our nation is in the midst of a crisis. Far too many of our Western landscapes are being lost to catastrophic wildfires. We have grown painfully accustomed to deadly and destructive blazes wreaking havoc throughout the West year after year.

In the last decade, over 60 million acres have burned, with over 10 million acres in the last year alone. The environmental damage caused by wildfires is undeniable, however the human cost is far greater. Since 2005, over 89,000 structures were destroyed by wildfires, leading to an untold number of deaths, and enormous personal losses. Entire towns have literally gone up in smoke.

Unfortunately, the Republican witness today, Mr. Dave Daley, knows the enormous personal loss of wildfires all too well. Mr. Daley is a fifth generation rancher who tragically lost most of his herd in the massive North Complex fire just last year in Northern California. Over 300,000 acres burned and 15 people tragically lost their lives. It was the 6th largest fire in California history, and the deadliest fire of 2020. Sadly, it was not alone, as California suffered through 5 of top 10 worst wildfires in state history last year.

Mr. Daley and his family know what good stewardship looks like. They have been ranching in Northern California since 1882 and have responsibly taken care of the land. Continuing to ignore the ticking time bombs that we have allowed our national forests to become is the opposite of good stewardship.

While the frequency of this devastation has blunted some of our collective shock, we must not allow that to turn into

complacency. We must also dispel the notion that there is nothing that we can do.

The title of today's hearing is wildfire in a warming world, and while I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this very important topic, too frequently many of my friends on the other side of this dais have blamed climate change for an ever-growing multitude of sins, including wildfires, while ignoring the real culprit of our present disaster.

Decades of insufficient forest management, not climate change, have led to overgrown, diseased and dying forests throughout the West. While a staggering 63 million acres of forest land remain at a high risk for wildfire in the U.S., the Forest Service is completing less than 5 percent of its necessary fuels reduction projects. At this paltry pace, we won't tackle our high-risk backlog for decades, and we will continue to

experience devastating wildfire seasons in perpetuity with no end in sight.

Luckily, Republicans have offered real solutions to this problem. I've previously introduced the "Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act," which enhances the hugely successful Good Neighbor Authority by fixing errors in the 2018 Farm Bill that have not allowed tribes and counties to take full advantage of this authority. Recently, I also introduced the "Forestry Education and Workforce Development Act," which invests \$20 million annually in education programs at land grant colleges and universities and technical schools to encourage students to pursue careers in forestry. In fact, half of the witnesses testifying at this hearing today are professors at land grant universities, demonstrating the need to support these schools as we help train the next generation of forestry professionals.

These are real achievable steps that we can take to meaningfully turn the tide against this historical challenge, and I implore my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to come to the table to help us provide them. Mr. Daley and his family deserve better from us, as do all in the western communities that continue to suffer from out-of-control fires. The American people deserve better from us. We must do better.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony. I yield back the balance of my time.