



Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bruce Westerman
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. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our nation’s wildfire crisis, and I am hopeful that today’s discussion will be the first of many hearings we have on this issue and will lead to meaningful bipartisan action to address the poor health of our nation’s forests. It is truly heartbreaking to see the how many of the nation’s once flourishing forests have transformed into overgrown, dead, and burned-out wastelands.

Conservative estimates put the amount of forest land at a high risk for wildfire at over 63 million acres, and the Forest Service is completing fuels reduction treatments on just 1.4 million acres a year, far less than what is needed. 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. We must also address the enormous environmental ruin that has been left in the wake of catastrophic fire. In just the last ten years, over 60 million acres have been torched. To put that number into perspective, that is roughly the same size as the entire state of Michigan.

That’s why it is incredibly frustrating that we will be hearing testimony today from certain Majority witnesses who will advocate for doing *less* treatment on our federal lands, not more. I’d like to ask unanimous consent to submit a letter for the record signed by over 3 dozen scientists advocating for science-based forest management policies that recognize the carbon sequestration benefits of active management and harvested wood products.

The letter directly refutes conclusions reached by one of our panelists, Dr. Law, and states: “[Dr.] Law [and her colleagues] used process models that suggest the forest sector was a net source of GHG

instead of a net sink in Oregon. To get that result they assumed that harvested forests are not replanted (though that is required by law), wood products were mostly used for low value, short-lived products, wood substitution was of minimal significance, and large wildfire losses were excluded from their dataset as uncharacteristic, including the 2002 Biscuit wildfire.”

You don’t need a degree from Yale to tell you that those are some pretty major holes in their research. What science actually tells us is that thinning and prescribed fire increase forest carbon by as much as 18% compared to no-harvest scenarios, which equates “to [the] removal of carbon emissions from 55,000 to 110,000 passenger vehicles per year until the end of the century.” In contrast, catastrophic wildfires in untreated areas can release tens of millions of metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere. This was the case last year in California, where wildfire emissions equated to driving roughly 24 million passenger vehicles on our roads for an entire year.

If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are truly interested in “opportunities to improve community collaboration, climate resilience

and workforce capacity” like this hearing title suggests, the good news is that I have a simple solution for them: sign onto the “Trillion Trees Act.”

I re-introduced this bipartisan bill last week, and to date it has almost 90 cosponsors and over 50 groups endorsing it. This bill offers a three-pronged approach that will spur scientifically-sound regeneration, streamline forest management efforts, and incentivize carbon sequestration through the utilization of wood products to help sequester up to 205 gigatons of carbon, an amount equivalent to two-thirds of all manmade emissions remaining in the atmosphere today.

Committee Republicans stand ready to rise to this occasion, and I remain hopeful that we will be able to work with our Democratic friends to achieve the type of meaningful actions included in the Trillion Trees Act that are necessary to reverse the tide of the wildfire crisis.

With that, I look forward to hearing the testimony today and yield back the balance of my time.