



**Opening Statement for Ranking Member Bruce Westerman
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**

Legislative Hearing on 5 bills: H.R. 3132 (Rep. Amodei), the Lake Tahoe Restoration Reauthorization Act; H.R. 2049 (Rep. Panetta), the Repairing Existing Land by Adding Necessary Trees (REPLANT) Act; H.R. 2816 (Rep. Schrier), the Legacy Roads and Trails Act; H.R. 3211 (Rep. Neguse), the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Act; H.R. 4300 (Rep. Miller-Meeks), the Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to echo the sentiments shared by Ranking Member Fulcher about the Veterans in Parks Act being included in today's hearing. This is a great piece of legislation from one of our freshman Members, Representative Miller-Meeks, and I'd like to applaud her for her advocacy on behalf of the veterans' community.

Unfortunately, not all of the bills on today's hearing can be applauded. In fact, some are just plain bad policy. While H.R. 2049 has a well-intentioned mission, it excludes vital forest management policies that make it **more like the "REFUEL Act" rather than the "REPLANT Act."**

Last year, we saw catastrophic wildfires burn 10.3 million acres across the country. This year, we've already had 59 large fires burn over 850,000 acres in 12 states. And instead of talking about ways to increase

the pace and scale of management, like Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen has called for this year, **we are quite literally discussing adding more fuel to the fire when our nation's forests are incinerating in real time.**

Planting trees alone is not a climate solution. In fact, planting trees and then walking away, leaving them to burn up again and release more carbon into the atmosphere during a catastrophic wildfire, is literally the opposite of what we should be doing if we care about addressing climate change.

As one of our witnesses, Dr. Elaine Oneil, will testify to today, the REPLANT Act is an **“extremely limited small-scale vision that puts a band-aid on the problems facing our national forest system.”** Our forests are becoming carbon sources instead of carbon sinks and the only way to truly address this is through a three-pronged approach of: management, utilization, and regeneration.

The Forest Service currently estimates that it has a 1.3 million-acre reforestation backlog. While addressing this backlog is very real issue, the agency will never fully be able to tackle its reforestation needs until it better manages the forests that are still intact. If we don't manage our forests now, we will continue adding millions upon millions of acres to

our reforestation backlog. Put simply, increasing resources for reforestation without also ensuring we can manage those new trees will all but guarantee the next generation of catastrophic wildfires.

Another missing component of this bill is utilization. When we harvest wood products, those products are roughly 50 percent carbon by weight and will store that carbon for as long as they're in use. From mass timber construction to new and innovative products like biochar, there are endless possibilities to sequester carbon through wood products. Not including wood products in any discussion about forestry and climate change is unserious, and this Committee would be well served to start holding hearings on bills that promote more wood utilization from our national forests.

Sadly, this bill also falls short on its own laudable reforestation goals. While the agency does undeniably need more resources, it also needs more labor, seedlings, and technology to meet our total reforestation needs. The Forest Service is currently meeting less than 5 percent of its reforestation needs every year and **simply throwing money at the problem is not sufficient to solve this**. Instead, we need a far more **comprehensive approach like the ones included in my Trillion Trees Act** and introduced by members of this Committee including Representatives Fulcher, Bentz, and Moore.

I have a lot of respect for my friend and colleague from California, Congressman Panetta. While I disagree with his approach in this particular bill, I know that he takes very thoughtful approaches to these issues and I look forward to working with him in the future.

However, if we are truly concerned about climate change, then this bill is too narrow in scope and short sighted. Planting trees alone is not a sufficient climate solution and is bad policy. Instead, we need to manage our forests, utilize sustainable wood products, and engage in smart regeneration in areas that need it the most. **Perhaps it's about time we held a hearing on the Trillion Trees Act.** With that, I yield back the balance of my time.