

**EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S FISCAL
YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST
FOR THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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OVERSIGHT HEARING ON EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE

**Wednesday, April 26, 2023
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Tiffany, Lamborn, Fulcher, Stauber, Curtis, Bentz, Moylan, Westerman; Neguse, Kamlager-Dove, Levin, and Leger Fernández.

Also present: Representatives Boebert, Gosar, Hageman, LaMalfa, and Rosendale.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the President's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service.

I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Gosar; the gentleman from California, Mr. LaMalfa; the gentlewoman from Colorado, Mrs. Boebert; the gentleman from Montana, Mr. Rosendale; and the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman, be allowed to participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM TIFFANY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

Mr. TIFFANY. The focus of our hearing today is on the budget priorities of the Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2024. This is a continuation of the important work this Committee has conducted this month as we review the budget requests of Federal agencies under our purview.

Despite the catastrophic wildfire crisis affecting the West, including the districts of many members on this dais, Committee

Democrats did not hold a single oversight hearing of the Forest Service's budget last Congress.

We are pleased to have before us today the Chief of the Forest Service, Randy Moore, who is appearing before our Committee for this first time since he assumed this important role almost 2 years ago.

Chief Moore, your appearance before this Committee is long overdue. But with Republicans in the Majority, I can assure you there will be many more invitations coming your way as we look to work with you to confront the myriad of challenges facing our nation's forests.

As we begin our discussion today, I think it is important to dispel some of the rhetoric leveled against Republican budget proposals that seek to restore some fiscal sanity to our Federal spending. Democrats on this Committee have inaccurately alleged Republican proposals seek to decrease wildland fire management funding. This could not be further from the truth.

Republicans have proposed securing funding at Fiscal Year 2022 spending levels. This is important because Fiscal Year 2022 wild-fire funding for the Forest Service is actually \$247 million higher than this Fiscal Year. When you include the Department of the Interior, Republicans would be giving the agencies an increase of more than \$340 million, compared to Democrats' Fiscal Year 2023 levels.

Further, the Limit, Save, Grow Act, which we will be debating this week on the House Floor, would extend the fire suppression cap adjustment past its current expiration date in 2027. This will ensure certainty for the agencies so they will not have to resort to fire borrowing.

And let's not forget who set our current funding levels: Congressional Democrats and the Biden administration. That is right. Congressional Democrats cut wildfire appropriations this year by over \$340 million. So, when you hear a lot of talk today about draconian 22 percent cuts and the devastating effects they will have, perhaps you will ask yourself why Congressional Democrats cut hazardous fuels appropriations for the Forest Service by 33 percent this year.

This unfounded criticism does, however, highlight the flawed logic of assuming we can continue to throw money at this problem without meaningful regulatory reforms and expect any difference in our catastrophic wildfire crisis.

The Forest Service's Fiscal Year 2024 budget is requesting \$9.7 billion, a nearly 18 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2023 enacted levels. The agency also received over \$10 billion through the IIJA and Inflation Reduction Act. Yet, the Forest Service budget is only proposing an additional 400,000 acres treated this year, a mere 10 percent increase. We have repeatedly heard from the Forest Service there needs to be a paradigm shift, and the agency must double or quadruple the amount of acres it treats. A 10 percent increase in response to the deluge of funding this agency has received is not the paradigm shift the West needs.

These results are hardly a surprise. No amount of money is going to overcome the fact that right now it takes an average of 3.6 years to even begin a mechanical treatment on our national forests, due

to burdensome NEPA regulations. Prescribed burns are even worse, taking an average of 4.7 years to complete NEPA. Democrats have stayed in lockstep with extreme environmentalist groups, and refused to offer any substantive reforms to improve the management of our national forests.

For the small reforms we are able to give the Forest Service, such as emergency authorities or categorical exclusions for fuel breaks, they are not being utilized by the agency at the pace and scale needed. Committee Republicans stand ready to fulfill our responsibility to the American people, and usher in a new phase of accountability and transparency for the Forest Service as we pursue innovative solutions to reverse the tide against this historic crisis.

Today's hearing is an important step on this front, and I look forward to discussing the agency's plans to actively manage our forests, suppress wildfires promptly and carefully, pay wildland firefighters in a fiscally responsible manner, and increase timber production.

I want to once again thank Chief Moore for being here today.

We look forward to hearing your testimony.

Before I recognize Ranking Member Neguse for his opening statement, I would like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a table from the non-partisan Congressional Research Service showing Congressional Democrats and the Biden administration had the following budget cuts this year: \$93.3 million decrease for Department of the Interior wildfire appropriations; \$247.2 million decrease for Forest Service wildfire appropriations, including a \$155.4 million decrease for hazardous fuels reduction; \$340.6 million decrease for overall Forest Service and Interior wildfire spending.

Without objection, so entered.

[The information follows:]

CRS TABLE

Table I. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations (\$ in millions)

Account	FY2022		FY2023				
	Total Enacted	Request	H-Passed H.R. 8294	S-Introduced S. 4686	Enacted		Total
					Regular	Supplemental	
FS, Total	\$5,685.1	\$4,985.1	\$4,992.2	\$4,964.7	\$3,464.5	\$1,973.4	\$5,437.9
WFM, Total	2,557.3	2,678.7	2,678.7	2,604.7	946.0	1,582.0	2,528.0
Salaries and Expenses	1,302.1	1,154.3	1,154.3	1,154.3	914.0	—	914.0
Preparedness	172.0	192.0	192.0	192.0	32.0	—	32.0
Suppression	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	—	1,546.0	1,546.0
Other/Unallocated	72.2	—	—	—	—	36.0	36.0
Hazardous Fuels	—	321.4	321.4	247.4	—	—	—
Wildfire Adjustment	2,120.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	—	2,210.0
NFS Hazardous Fuels	465.2	—	—	—	207.0	102.8	309.8
Other	542.6	96.4	103.5	150.0	101.5	288.6	390.1
DOI, Total	1,863.7	1,539.6	1,543.1	1,503.3	1,003.8	766.6	1,770.4
WFM, Total	1,533.7	1,199.6	1,203.1	1,163.3	663.8	766.6	1,430.4
Preparedness	446.5	477.2	477.2	477.2	381.8	87.6	469.4
Suppression	383.7	383.7	383.7	383.7	—	458.7	458.7
Fuels Management	534.6	304.3	304.3	267.0	247.0	156.4	403.4
Other/Unallocated	169.0	34.5	38.0	35.5	35.0	64.0	98.9
Wildfire Adjustment	330.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	—	340.0
Total, FS and DOI	7,548.8	6,524.7	6,535.3	6,467.9	4,468.2	2,740.0	7,208.2

Sources: CRS, with information from the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and other budget documents.

Notes: FY2022 Total Enacted reflects regular and supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-43, P.L. 117-58, and P.L. 117-103. FY2023 Regular Enacted reflects appropriations provided in P.L. 117-328; FY2023 Supplemental Enacted reflects appropriations provided in P.L. 117-58, and P.L. 117-328. WFM = Wildland Fire Management; NFS = National Forest System. Totals may not add due to rounding.

Mr. TIFFANY. I will now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Neguse, for his opening statement.

I know you are perhaps a bit tired this morning, but thank you for your work on Rules last night.

Mr. NEGUSE. Well, I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I enjoyed participating in Rules yesterday until about 3 in the morning, but I am also glad to be here in this Committee today.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOE NEGUSE, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO**

Mr. NEGUSE. Chief Moore, it is good to see you again. I really enjoyed working with you when I was Chairman of this Subcommittee, and welcoming you to Colorado on numerous occasions. It is good to see you back here in person in Washington.

I have some remarks, and I had intended to, and I still will, compliment you on the work that you have done and, I think, the hard work that folks in the Forest Service are doing each and every day on behalf of the American people. But you have come to this Committee at an interesting time, as you might have gathered from my friend, the Chairman's, opening remarks. And this has little to do with the Forest Service, and everything, unfortunately, to do with the politics of Washington, DC. I am surprised because some of the same arguments that I heard in Rules last night are the same arguments I am hearing this morning.

Republicans put forward a budget, and they bragged about how this budget is cutting spending, aggressively cutting spending. They are proud of that. The moment, the moment, there begins to be an outcry from the public about a variety of the different draconian cuts that this budget imposes, they disclaim that their budget does anything of the sort. It is amazing to me. I was dumbfounded by it last night in Rules, and I am as incredulous this morning as I guess I was yesterday when this happened, because they will put forward a budget that cuts the Forest Service, and then tell you that it doesn't.

And I am eager to hear from you, Chief Moore, about the ways in which their budget proposal, this default on America bill that they have proposed, would impact the Forest Service. We don't have to debate about opinions about the legislation. We have the language.

We will hear from the Chief as to how that language, if enacted, which it won't be. This bill, it is dead on arrival in the House, certainly dead on arrival in the Senate, it won't be signed by the President. But in any event, as an esoteric matter, we will hear from the Chief about the ways in which their proposal will impact the Forest Service. I am confident that it will not be along the lines that our Chairman described.

I also will say I find it rather rich that the same individuals who voted against the \$1.6 billion investment in fuel reduction, \$1.6 billion in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that Mitch McConnell and a half dozen Republican Senators voted for, and that I believe not a single Member, maybe 1 or 2, of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle in this Committee voted for, these same Members now have the audacity to question you, Mr. Moore, and your team about the fuels reduction projects, by the way, that are happening in their own states, in their districts.

The last time I saw you in person was in Colorado. I welcomed you to Colorado as we were excited to announce the first infusion of \$33 million in hazardous fuels reduction projects in the Arapahoe Roosevelt in my district, as well as the Pike San Isabel National Forest, a portion of which was in my prior district, and the rest, of course, in my colleague from Colorado Springs, my friend Mr. Lamborn's district.

I don't get it. And maybe, again, I mean, I haven't been in Congress that long, so this is just how Washington works, I guess. But it is puzzling to me that you have a bipartisan bill that invests in hazardous fuels reduction, important investments. My colleagues vote against it. The projects are happening in their district. Nonetheless, they propose now a bill to cut the budget of the very same agency responsible for implementing those projects that they claim are so necessary for the health of their forests and the well-being of their constituents. I just don't get it.

I have limited time left. I had long remarks prepared but, unfortunately, deviated a bit. I will simply say to you, Mr. Moore, that we are grateful for your service. I think you have done an exceptional job.

I am grateful for the hard work of the Forest Service folks in my district on the White River National Forest, Routt National Forest, Arapahoe Roosevelt. You know the supervisors there, some of the

hardest working people in the United States who work really closely with our team. They are under-funded. They need more resources. And I am glad to see that the President's budget contemplates the kind of investment in workforce that we are going to need to ensure that the projects that we all agree are necessary can ultimately come to fruition.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. Thank you to the Ranking Member for your opening remarks, and we will now move on to witness testimony.

Let me remind the witness that under Committee Rules, he must limit his oral statement to 5 minutes, but his entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, please press the "on" button on the microphone.

We use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red, and I will ask you to please complete your statement.

I would now like to introduce Mr. Randy Moore, who is the Chief of the United States Forest Service.

Chief Moore, you are now recognized. First of all, welcome once again, and you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF RANDY MOORE, CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEMS, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. MOORE. Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. I appreciate the opportunity to share how the Forest Service is putting America's money to work.

The Fiscal Year 2024 request focuses on three primary areas: modernizing the Wildland Fire Management System; confronting the wildfire crisis; and ensuring equitable access to and benefits from the National Forest System.

The people we serve deserve nothing less than to see the value of their money at work for their benefit. National forests and grasslands cover about 193 million acres. Some 180 million people in over 68,000 communities rely on these lands to capture and filter drinking water. Our work contributes to over 373,000 jobs and \$40.3 billion to the GDP. We work with tribes, state and local governments, private landowners, and many others across the country to keep forests and grasslands healthy and safe.

Today, America's forests face dire threats from wildfire, climate change, insects, and disease, especially in the West. This is an emergency in many places, and we are enticing and acting with a sense of urgency in collaboration with communities and our partners. Our top priority is to reduce wildfire threats by safeguarding communities and critical infrastructure, creating healthy, resilient forests.

Through our Wildfire Crisis Strategy, we have ramped up to treat the right places at the right scale using an all-lands, all-hands approach. This past January, we announced investments of \$930 million in 21 high-risk landscapes in the West, benefiting roughly 200 communities and many other resources that people value.

In addition, we have awarded nearly \$200 million in Community Wildfire Defense Grants toward 100 projects to 22 states and 7 tribes. Recent investments by Congress gives us a historic opportunity to take bold and strategic action. We are working to do just that, to put every dollar to good use.

We are grateful to Congress for investing foundational funding to do this work. Sustained execution, though, depends on continued Federal investments. The proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget responds to this need. All of our work to reduce wildfire risks become increasingly important in the face of another upcoming busy Western fire season. We will have approximately 11,300 firefighters and a full array of aircraft ready to respond safely to any and all fires. We will fully engage with state, local, and tribal partners ready to respond with us.

In support of our firefighters, this budget also calls for a \$1.4 billion investment in salaries, health and safety, and well-being for all of our firefighters. A suite of new actions will permanently increase pay, improve options for housing, and provide better care and support for physical and mental health. It also increases the number of firefighters, and we need the help of this Committee to authorize this proposal.

While firefighters represent the backbone of our wildfire system, we also need active and aggressive land management to confront the wildfire crisis. This budget invests \$300 million in hazardous fuels treatments. It supports execution of wildfire crisis strategy. It targets investment in burned area rehabilitation for \$56 million to expedite recovery from wildfire. It supports use of the latest research and grants to universities to support educational and technical assistance for innovative wood products.

The national forest and grasslands belongs to every American. Every person should feel a personal invitation and a connection to these lands. We remain committed to removing barriers so all people can enjoy National Forest System lands and services, particularly tribal and underserved communities. We continue to focus policies, accountability, and training to ensure an equitable, respectful, and harassment-free workforce and work environment for all of our employees.

We know what is at stake if we don't address the effects of climate change and the wildfire crisis: the health of our forests and communities, clean water, a vibrant wood products industry, and jobs and resources that Americans depend on. We need to act now if we are going to meet these challenges. So, thank you, and I am grateful for your support, and I welcome any questions that you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Moore follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RANDY MOORE, CHIEF, USDA FOREST SERVICE

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's fiscal year (FY) 2024 Budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service.

The fiscal year 2024 President's Budget for the USDA Forest Service discretionary appropriations totals \$7.4 billion for base programs and \$2.3 billion for the wildfire suppression cap adjustment (in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund). The fiscal year 2024 request focuses on three primary areas: modernizing the wildland fire management system; confronting the wildfire crisis; and ensuring equitable access to and benefits from the National Forest System.

The investments highlighted below reflect services the Forest Service delivers through work on National Forests, partnerships with State, Private, and Tribal landowners, and our Research and Development mission area. These investments enable the Forest Service to restore long-term forest health and resiliency across landscapes the American people rely on while ensuring equitable access to the resources on National Forest lands. Alongside our partners, the Forest Service will continue to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires to communities in FY 2024 through investments in the highest priority landscapes identified within the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Forest Service will maximize every dollar invested into our agency, making every dollar work for the American people. The people we serve deserve nothing less than to see the value of their money at work for their benefit.

The President's FY 2024 Budget Request for Specific Priorities to Support Focal Areas

The following investments align with and enhance the agency's efforts to modernize the wildland fire management system:

- **\$1.4 billion for Wildland Fire Management Salaries and Expenses:** Investing in our wildland firefighting workforce is a matter of national security as critical infrastructure, homes, communities, structures, and natural resources are at grave and growing risk of catastrophic wildfire. The FY 2024 budget funds a permanent increase in pay for the wildland firefighter workforce, providing a more livable wage, enhancing recruitment, and supporting retention. Specifically, this request includes:
 - \$180 million for increasing base pay for federal wildland firefighters to ensure that this crucial workforce does not face a pay cliff at the end of this year;
 - \$69 million to support cost of living increases for FY 2024;
 - \$259 million for increasing federal firefighting capacity (an estimated 970 additional federal firefighters and personnel) to expand our ability to address the wildfire crisis and reduce the strain on our current workforce;
 - \$10 million for vital health and well-being assistance to more comprehensively support our wildfire firefighter workforce;
 - \$50 million to address the urgent need for wildland firefighter housing through necessary maintenance and repairs of Forest Service housing units that will support our recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts.
- **\$323 million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction:** To mitigate wildfire risk on 4.2 million acres in high priority and high-risk fire sheds, building on hazardous fuels funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act and aligned with the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

The following investments ensure that national forests and grasslands continue to provide experiences, services, and products to the American public by focusing on the restoration, enhancement, and resilience of the Nation's forests and grasslands:

- **\$56 million for the Burned Area Rehabilitation:** to build on capacity created with the \$65 million per year seed money from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to rehabilitate burned areas and free up existing funding for more proactive forest health work.
- **\$94 million for Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness:** to increase support of critical recreation operations, planning, services, and improvements, with particular emphasis on creating welcoming, sustainable, and equitable recreation opportunities for all Americans with a focus toward underserved and Tribal communities.

- **\$50.5 million for Vegetation and Watershed Management:** to support healthy and resilient watersheds and landscapes, sustain the production of clean and abundant air and water, assist with meeting the Administration's climate goals, and contribute to healthy and productive communities and Tribal Nations.
- **\$45 million for Minerals and Geology Management:** to locate and prioritize orphaned oil and gas wells for remediation and the inventory, environmental analysis, and clean-up of mine reclamation sites.
- **\$7.8 million for Grazing Management:** to support post-fire restoration, provide for strategic incentives to grazing permittees, and build vibrant rural economies.
- **\$55 million for Forest Health Management:** to ensure healthy forests and functional landscapes on federal and non-federal lands in support of the conservation priorities of the Administration.
- **\$80 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program:** to invest in communities and regions with a collaborative, common purpose in reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health and resiliency.
- **\$1.7 billion for National Forest System Salaries and Expenses:** to support the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy as well as critical non-fire programs, which have decreased in funding over time as wildland fire response needs escalated.

Further investments ensure that the Forest Service relies on the latest science and technology to deliver results on the ground and for the people:

- **\$502 million for Information Technology Capabilities:** to continue modernization of our Information Technology systems that allow the public to better access our services, sustain emergency communication systems, and provide our workforce the tools they need to carry out our conservation mission safely and efficiently.
- **\$72 million for Zero Emissions Vehicles:** included across several program funding requests to invest in replacing vehicles within the agency fleet and to provide for employees and visitors with charging infrastructure.
- **\$349 million for Forest and Rangeland Research:** to continue investments in research priorities, with a focus on climate change-related research including reforestation, carbon accounting, and fire and fuels research.
- **\$6 million for USDA Climate Hubs:** to accelerate science production and technology transfer that will aid management agencies, private landowners, and agricultural producers adopt scientifically sound climate adaptation practices.

Confronting the Wildfire Crisis

The Forest Service's paramount focus continues to be combatting the threat and impact of destructive wildfire to our nation's communities, critical infrastructure, forests, rangelands, water supplies, and wildlife. Changing environmental conditions have lengthened fire seasons into fire years and worsened wildfires across the West. Expanding development into the wildland/urban interface (WUI) increasingly puts more homes into fire-prone landscapes and increases the challenge and complexity of wildfire suppression and fuels reduction work. Most wildfires that cause significant damage to a large number of homes and other structures are human caused; 97% of wildfires threaten homes; and almost one-third of American homes are within the WUI.

The Forest Service has a historic opportunity now, between the investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and our annual appropriations, to implement solutions at a large scale. We are now entering our second year of carrying out our 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Wildfire Crisis Strategy aims to increase science-based fuels treatments by up to four times previous treatment levels, especially in those areas at highest risk. By working in the right places at the right scale, our treatments can reduce wildfire risk and better protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources while helping wildland firefighters respond to wildfires safely and effectively.

The Forest Service cannot succeed in this alone. The highest risk fire sheds are typically in multiple landownerships. The Forest Service will continue to strengthen our long-standing work and relationships with Tribes, States, local communities,

private landowners, and other stakeholders to adapt lessons learned into a coordinated and effective program of work as outlined in the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. Through government-to-government consultation with Tribes, expanded partnerships and co-stewardship, and broader community support, the Forest Service will increase the use of prescribed fire, fuel treatments, and the management of unplanned ignitions to reduce long-term wildfire risks. Fortunately, we have decades of experience working through collaborative partnerships based on common values and shared goals across shared landscapes as set out in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Ensuring Equitable Access to and Benefits from the National Forest System

The Forest Service will continue to invest in actions that create broad and efficient access to the vital resources our forests and grasslands provide. This effort is twofold. First, we must ensure that those who rely on these services and benefits can access those benefits safely. Therefore, we are committed to improving the operation and maintenance of our extensive infrastructure portfolio that includes buildings, dams, communication sites, recreation sites, roads, trails, and bridges. Second, to carry out this work effectively, the Forest Service is committed to continued intentional internal and external engagement with Tribal Nations whose ancestral homelands are within or adjacent to federally managed public lands, and communities that live by, visit, and depend on national forests. The Forest Service is committed to identifying and removing barriers to access Forest Service programs and services for historically underserved communities. This will be done by integrating equity-centered criteria in the design, funding, and prioritization of all policies, programs, and activities to center equity considerations as part of the decision process. The Forest Service will also work to advance mission critical work, remove barriers and boost economic opportunities through improved access to contracts, grants and agreements, and permits.

Leveraging Additional Funding Authorities

Along with the tools and investments proposed in the FY 2024 Presidents Budget, the Forest Service will leverage funding within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to confront the wildfire crisis, create new markets and technology for wood products, promote economic development, and restore forest health and resiliency through partnerships and collaboration across landscapes.

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), Congress provided a \$1.4 billion down payment that greatly assists in putting our Wildfire Crisis Strategy into action with investments on ten landscapes in eight Western States (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington). Through work on these landscapes and others, we completed treatments on 3.2 million acres nationally in 2022. We also accomplished these treatments in 118 of the 250 high-risk fireheds identified in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. This work was accomplished despite numerous challenges including workforce capacity and high post-fire workloads from historic wildfire activity across the country the past several years. The work on these acres directly reduced risk to communities, infrastructure, and critical watersheds.

The Inflation Reduction Act provides the Forest Service an additional \$1.8 billion for hazardous fuels funding in the WUI. With IRA funding, we recently selected 11 additional landscapes for treatment in seven Western States (Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington). Combined with the initial BIL investment landscapes, our actions will span nearly 45 million acres across 134 of the 250 high-risk fireheds in the western U.S., with a total investment to date of \$930 million on 21 landscapes in 2023. These investments will help reduce the risk of wildfire to at-risk communities, Tribal lands, critical infrastructure, utility corridors, and public water sources. We listened to our partners, the public we serve, Tribes and many others regarding what mattered most to them, where opportunity is, and where challenges remain. Their feedback and our experience on these landscapes helped us identify both challenges to implementation and enabling conditions for future success.

Through Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) (P.L. 116-152) funding for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund, the Forest Service continues to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities in the national forests and grasslands. The GAOA also permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), with which the Forest Service invests in conservation and recreation opportunities in public and private lands through the Forest Legacy Program and Federal Land Acquisition.

Forest Service projects will support about 3,500 jobs and contribute \$350 million to the GDP on an average annual basis over the 5-year authorization of the GAOA National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. In FY 2024, the Forest Service proposes \$94.3 million for the Forest Legacy Program, \$123.9 million for Federal Land Acquisition, and \$285 million for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. The FY 2024 project lists are included in the FY 2024 Budget request.

In closing, the President's FY 2024 Budget request for the Forest Service proposes a landmark investment in wildland fire, establishes funding priorities for risk-based wildfire reduction, and improves overall access and utilization of our National Forests System. The FY 2024 Budget request underscores our commitment to long-overdue investments in our wildland firefighter workforce to provide them with the compensation that they deserve, along with critical investments to support health and wellbeing, and expanded options for housing. The FY 2024 Budget also highlights the importance of restoring and creating resilient landscapes, improving infrastructure, and removing barriers to access. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to fulfill the President's goals and our key responsibilities for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands, and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO RANDY MOORE, CHIEF,
UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

Mr. Moore did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.

Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman

Forest Management

Question 1. During the hearing, you mentioned that the Forest Service is using categorical exclusions for roughly 85 percent of the forest management work being done, which you said was roughly 4,000 categorical exclusions. Can you please provide statistics that shows which categorical exclusions are being used, and how many times each categorical exclusion has been used in the last 5 years?

Question 2. How much of the direct work at the national forest level is planning and assessment to include the preparation of environmental review documents under NEPA?

Question 3. How much did the Forest Service spend last year on planning or environmental review costs for meeting the requirements of applicable laws generally? How much did the agency spend on direct work at the national forest level?

Question 4. How many staff hours did the Forest Service spend last year on planning or environmental review costs for meeting the requirements of applicable laws? How many staff hours did the agency spend on direct work at the national forest level?

Question 5. The persistent drought, particularly out West, has only exacerbated the wildfire crisis. How does the ongoing drought and current drought mitigation efforts impact forest management and hazardous fuel reduction?

Question 6. There are many federally funded data and analytic tools to determine how drought and other climate-related factors can be mitigated. Drought mitigation can help reduce the severity and frequency of catastrophic wildfires.

6a) How is the Forest Service utilizing tools such as the U.S. Drought Monitor and other products produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC)?

6b) Are there additional data products federal partners could provide to help the Forest Service proactively deploy drought mitigation planning efforts?

Question 7. Last fiscal year, despite historic investments, the Forest Service sold roughly 2.9 billion board feet of timber, which is down over 10 percent compared to pre-pandemic levels.

7a) What steps is your agency taking to increase the amount of timber harvested on Forest Service lands so that we can return to pre-pandemic levels?

7b) If wildfires are the issue is reaching pre-pandemic levels of timber harvesting, how quickly is the Forest Service converting those timber sales to salvage sales? Are you re-doing completed NEPA work to convert these sales post-wildfire?

Question 8. What effect are litigation and threats of litigation having on the Forest Service's ability to combat wildfires and improve the health of our forests?

Question 9. The Forest Service's budget justification states the agency is aiming to treat 4.2 million acres, which is only a 10 percent increase compared to last year's target. The "Confronting the Wildfire Strategy" calls for treating two to four times the amount of acres the agency currently treats, which far exceeds this 10 percent increase.

9a) What are the barriers that are preventing the Forest Service from scaling up its hazardous fuels treatments?

9b) Is the Forest Service on track to meet its goal of treating 20 million additional acres, as outlined in the 10-year strategy?

9c) How many acres should the Forest Service be treating this year to be on track to meet the target of 20 million additional acres treated?

Question 10. Chief Moore's testimony states several times that engagement with Tribal nations and reducing hazardous fuels on a landscape scale are a "paramount focus". However, the FY 2024 budget includes a \$3 million cut to Landscape Scale Restoration projects. Regarding the \$3 million cut, your own budget justification states, and I quote: "This decrease would reduce the number of projects with Tribes, States, and other eligible partners by 12 projects and result in reduced land treatment and restoration activities on non-Federal lands, based on prior year performance data. It would reduce planned funding for Tribes by \$1 million, which is one of ten key priorities identified in the USDA Equity Action Plan. Past performance of projects supported by the Landscape Scale Restoration program have demonstrated success in reducing wildland fire risk, improving forest conditions, and mitigating impacts from insects and disease and leveraging public and private resources."

10a) How does the Forest Service reconcile its apparent commitment to Tribal nations with budget cuts that directly support tribal work?

10b) How is this cut consistent with the "Confronting the Wildfire Strategy", which states that the agency must increase its landscape-scale work by four times?

10c) Does this cut represent a trend to the Forest Service using mandatory funding to supplant, not supplement, discretionary funding?

Question 11. Why is the Forest Service requiring approval for proposals to use "Emergency Action" authority from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law from the National Office, USDA, and the White House? Is this consistent with approvals that are granted during wildfires to use emergency actions?

Question 12. During the hearing, Chairman Tiffany brought up discrepancies in the Forest Service's reports for hazardous fuels reduction treatments between regional and national Forest Service reports. For example, the Forest Service's initial landscape investments progress summary reported that 132,423 acres had been treated in the 4FRI priority landscape in Arizona last year. However, according to the regional Forest Service's reports on 4FRI (four fry), only 88,634 acres were treated last year.

12a) How does the Forest Service account for this discrepancy of over 43,000 acres?

12b) This discrepancy between the Forest Service's own published documents suggests the agency is inflating progress toward the 10-year strategy by nearly half. Is the Forest Service aware of other discrepancies in priority landscapes between the numbers being reported at the regional level versus the national level?

12c) What methodology is the Forest Service using to ensure acres are being reported accurately to track progress in the 10-year strategy?

12d) When measuring progress toward the 10-year strategy, is the Forest Service recording any acres more than once if multiple treatments are conducted on the same parcel of land?

12e) If the Forest Service were to only record each acre once, regardless of how many treatments were completed on that acre, how would the reporting for each of the initial landscape investments differ from what the Forest Service published last year?

2023 Wildfire Year

Question 13. Our forests are worse off today than they ever have been. In the last 5 years alone, we have lost over 38 million acres to wildfires, roughly 14 million of which were a part of the National Forest System. The long-term wildfire outlook remains bleak, with roughly 89 percent of all Forest Service land identified as having the potential for wildfires to ignite and spread to communities.

13a) How has the recent flooding in the West has affected National Forest System lands?

13b) What is the Forest Service's outlook on what we should expect from the 2023 wildfire season?

13c) Can the Forest Service provide an update on the number of wildland firefighters the agency predicts it will need for the 2023 wildfire year?

Technology

Question 14. Chief Moore, the Forest Service is advancing forest management actions using innovative financing, new technology detection systems, and even software programs for NEPA compilation. Please share what you are doing to support these important steps to modernize your work in the woods.

Question 15. Advanced camera systems connected to artificial intelligence are now being used on a few forests to better detect wildfires and monitor controlled burns. This technology promises to better protect communities, conserve our forests, and reduce the cost of wildfire suppression. What are you doing to deploy this technology on National Forests this year and beyond?

Question 16. Can you please provide an update on the Request for Information / Sources Sought Notice entitled "Interagency Wildland Fire Personnel and Asset Tracking for Increased Situational Awareness" that was released in November 2022?

"Old Growth and Mature Forests"

Question 17. In light of the new inventory of mature and old-growth forests, can you please provide information about how many acres of NFS land that meet your new mature and old-growth definition framework have burned in wildfires in the last 10 years?

Question 18. Why was the inventory of mature and old-growth forests limited to Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service forests, and not to the other federal agencies that manage forests like the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Question 19. How much Forest Service staff time was used to develop the mature and old-growth inventory?

Question 20. Why is it important to manage forests to have a diversity of age classes?

Question 21. Can you please explain the importance of early successional forests?

Question 22. Is the term "mature forest" a recognized term in the scientific practice of forestry?

Question 23. Why is the Forest Service moving forward with and Advanced Notice of Public Rulemaking for mature forests when your report on old growth acknowledges that there is no scientific definition or consensus regarding what a mature forest is?

Question 24. Following up on a statement I made during the hearing, in the Forest Service's report on old growth, the report states that "narrative frameworks" are going to inform the "policy and practice of forest management" for old growth. The report also includes the following quote:

"The role of place attachment or identity, meaning "the symbolic importance of a place as a repository for emotions and relationships that give meaning and purpose to life" may also be particularly relevant in our understanding of how people relate to and value old-growth forests."

Is the Forest Service planning to manage old growth forests based on vague concepts like "place identity" instead of scientific forest management practices?

Great American Outdoors Act

Question 25. Since the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, the Forest Service has received \$235 million per year in National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Funds to address the deferred maintenance backlog. Yet in that amount of time, the Forest Service backlog has actually risen by roughly \$2.4 billion dollars. What do you attribute this sharp increase in your maintenance backlog to?

Question 26. How have inflation and supply chain issues impacted your ability to complete deferred maintenance projects on budget and on time?

Question 27. The Park Service has shared that they were previously using a methodology to calculate deferred maintenance and repairs that did not align with industry standards. Does the Forest Service's methodology to calculate deferred maintenance align with industry standards?

Question 28. Does the Forest Service have any plans to update its methodology for tracking deferred maintenance?

Question 29. What are the Forest Service's projections for what the total deferred maintenance backlog will be at the end of FY2023? Is the agency projecting it will increase or decrease from the current \$7.6 billion?

Question 30. How is the Forest Service defining "equitable access"?

Question 31. We've heard concerns that the Forest Service is not using deferred maintenance funding provided under GAOA to upgrade buildings that could be used as housing for firefighters because of internal guidance that GAOA funding only be used on recreation.

31a) Why isn't the Forest Service using GAOA funding to address deferred maintenance that could improve housing options for firefighters?

31b) Has the Forest Service conducted an inventory of existing structures that could be converted into firefighter housing if deferred maintenance was addressed? If not, does the Forest Service plan to conduct such inventory?

31c) How many existing structures could be used as housing for firefighters if deferred maintenance needs were addressed? What would be the total cost?

Wood Products Utilization

Question 32. This budget highlights that Forest Service Research and Development arm has studied the "effects of management actions and wildfire on the accumulation and loss of soil carbon, and the carbon storage effects of augmenting soil carbon with biochar." Can you share more about the research the Forest Service has conducted on biochar?

Question 33. Do you believe biochar and similar technologies could help the Forest Service remove more excess fuels?

Question 34. What can Congress do to incentivize the use of adoption of mass timber from materials on National Forest System lands?

Southern Border

Question 35. How much of the southern border is Forest Service land?

Question 36. In the Department of the Interior's FY 2024 budget justification, they identified illegal methamphetamine production as an issue on Federal lands.

36a) Has the Forest Service also identified illegal methamphetamine production on its lands?

36b) If yes, how much methamphetamine is being illegally produced on NFS lands and what environmental and safety impact is this having on NFS lands?

36c) If yes, what is the Forest Service doing to eradicate illegal methamphetamine production?

Question 37. Approximately how many wildland fires are ignited each year due to activities associated with illegal border crossers?

Energy Development

Question 38. A private company has been working for over a decade in my district to develop the work plan and secure required federal and state permits for an underground mining operation adjacent to the Ouachita National Forest. Most of surface

infrastructure will be located on privately held land. This project will provide jobs, spur economic development, provide a domestic resource for steel production, and have minimal surface disturbance. The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) is currently under review by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). I am concerned with how long the review process is taking. The draft EA was first submitted to the USFS, BLM, and Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) in April 2021. I understand the Forest Service is currently deciding if a Forest Plan Amendment is the next step.

38a) When will you have a decision?

38b) Will you please provide an update on where the process currently stands?

38c) Will you commit to providing the necessary USFS personnel and resources to meet timelines to review this permitting application?

Wildland Firefighters

Question 39. On March 30, the United States Department of Agriculture, along with Department of Interior and Office of Personnel Management, transmitted to Congress its federal wildland firefighter management legislative proposal.

39a) How much does the Forest Service believe the proposal will cost in its first year, presumably fiscal year 2024, and over 10 years?

39b) How much is specifically for firefighter pay in the first year, presumably fiscal year 2024, and over 10 years?

39c) Did the Forest Service conduct an analysis to compare the proposed federal new pay table to western states' firefighter pay? Will the new proposed pay for federal firefighters exceed state pay? Please provide a state-by-state breakdown of this data.

39d) In my district in Arkansas, many Forest Service employees are deployed out West during wildfire season. They are often referred to as militia members. These temporary assignments of employees are crucial to supporting the operations of the Forest Service. Does this proposal include pay increases for so called 'militia members'?

Question 40. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL, P.L. 117-58) provided funding for wildland firefighter mental wellbeing and directed the Secretary of Agriculture, with the Secretary of the Interior, to establish programs for wildland firefighters "to recognize and address mental health needs." Current updates to committee staff indicate a comprehensive plan for this funding has yet to be established.

40a) When will you have a public plan for the BIL funding for firefighter mental wellbeing?

40b) How are you engaging current and past wildland firefighters in developing tools, resources, and programs?

40c) The President's Budget asks for an additional \$10 million for firefighter health and well-being. Why is additional funding being requested? What will this money be used for that the first round of funding has yet to cover?

Telework Policies

Question 41. On April 10, 2023, President Biden signed Dr. Gosar's bill into law ending the COVID-19 public health emergency and the Office of Management and Budget released guidance to Departments to bring employees back into the office. Have you issued guidance directing Forest Service employees to return to the office?

41a) Will you commit to issuing guidance to Forest Service employees to return full-time to in-person work? If yes, when will you issue this guidance?

41b) Please tell the Committee how many Forest Service employees worked in person at the Forest Service on April 26, 2023 and what percentage worked virtually from home.

Question 42. Your budget requests a \$52 million increase in your Information Technology budget to support Forest Service employees working from home. During the Senate Energy and Natural Resources hearing of the Forest Service Budget Request, you indicated that this line item would likely need to be addressed in light of the Office of Management and Budget's guidance to "substantially increase in-person in the office." Should we expect to see an updated Budget Request that excludes this request for additional telework IT funding?

Fire Suppression Policies

Question 43. The Forest Service Budget is seeking a \$854 million increase for wildland fire management for this year, which would be a 40 percent increase from last year. How would this funding level be impacted if you were to lose the ability to use fire retardant?

Question 44. The contracting process from the US Forest Service for aviation fire-fighting vendors is more challenging than ever, with current contracts expiring early in the 2nd quarter of 2023, and new contracts under heavy protests and status of their awards unknown. Can you speak to this growing concern of no coverage secured for 2023 and what the USFS intends to do to solve this urgent matter?

Question 45. In recent years the US Forest Service has adapted the Lowest Price Technically Acceptable award methodology, or LPTA for bidding vendors. This process takes no consideration or weight for historical performance, industry experience, references, equipment quality/modernity, or safety record. On the contrary, forthcoming USFS contract requirements are requiring vendors to invest more in upgrades to their aircraft than ever with no certainty of any revenue, amidst the battle to win in the LPTA format. How can the USFS continue to ask for such advancements in aircraft, experience, and equipment but restricted their awards to be weighted solely on price in an extremely challenging economy?

Questions Submitted by Representative LaMalfa

Question 1. What steps is USFS taking to address the ever-increasing presence of illegal marijuana grow sites on federal lands?

Question 2. Does Director Moore agree that illegal marijuana cultivation and smuggling pose huge health and safety risks for both the environment and the public?

Question 3. Is the USFS currently undergoing any remediation or cleanup efforts at marijuana grow sites? If so, where are those actions taking place?

Question 4. Is the USFS studying or tracking the environmental harms of illegal marijuana grow sites and in particular on the pesticides used? To what extent have illegal pesticides been found at these grow sites?

Question 5. My colleague Rep McClintock and I sent a letter to you last year urging you to end the Let Burn policies. Is the USFS now implementing aggressive, initial attack strategies to extinguish wildfires detected on National Forest System lands not later than 24 hours after such a wildfire is detected in a way that is demonstrably different than previous years?

Question 6. Can you, as chief of the US Forest Service, commit to returning to the original language and intent of SRS Titles II and III (15% of annual SRS payments) regarding county allocations? This would allow counties and school systems that are locked into allocations based on 2011 or older SRS funding levels, to update their SRS allocation formulas to better meet their funding needs.

Question 7. Do you believe the increase in funds for staffing is sufficient, and what is your plan to scale up staffing levels to meet the goal of treating 20 million acres in 10 years?

Question 8. To address staffing shortage concerns, to what extent is the USFS looking outward to expanding volunteer engagement? Are there certain tasks that the USFS could rely more heavily on volunteer groups and other partners to complete?

Questions Submitted by Representative Leger Fernández

Question 1. This year New Mexico was blessed with snow that will help us address the drought. But those in the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire burn scar are scared of the subsequent floods and debris flow that will wipe out more roads, destroy more pasture, and flood more homes. I understand the Forest Service has begun seeding and mulching work on the Forest Service land in the burn scar.

Chief Moore, what is the Forest Service doing to coordinate with other agencies to make sure all lands—including private lands that the forest burnt—are rehabilitated to protect homes and property from the flooding we know is coming this spring?

Question 2. I appreciated Secretary Vilsack's response to my recent letter on the need for sustained funding solutions for Taos Pueblo's management of the Blue Lake Wilderness.

In the letter, the Secretary notes the USFS' work with the Pueblo through the Tribal Forest Protection Act program and on the Pueblo Ridge Project as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Reserved Treaty Rights Lands program.

From your perspective, what other USFS programs could potentially support Taos Pueblo's work to effectively manage the Blue Lake Wilderness and its other lands, more broadly?

Question 3. Chief Moore, thank you for your response to the letter I signed last year with my colleagues in the New Mexico Congressional Delegation on the need to protect the Upper Pecos Watershed. In your response, you state the Southwestern Region is evaluating the potential risk of mineral development in the Upper Pecos Watershed and whether our current laws and regulations are adequate for its protection.

Would you please describe the steps involved in said evaluation, its proposed timeline, and the entities involved?

In evaluating the risks to the Upper Pecos Watershed, I urge you to engage with all local stakeholders, including relevant tribes, local governments, acequias, land-grant mercedes, and landowners and users, such as farmers, ranchers, hunters, and anglers.

Question 4. Given the Congress' current work on the Farm Bill, would you please provide any legislative recommendations the USFS has to better serve tribes, such as improvements to the Tribal Forest Protection Act?

Question 5. How is the USFS' FY24 budget request addressing the reforestation needs of burned areas, which in New Mexico increased by nearly 1 million acres last year alone?

Question 6. How does the USFS' FY24 budget address the need for treatments on the private lands that are embedded within or surrounding National Forests in the very same places identified as top priority in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy?

Question 7. In light of the Hermit's Peak Calf/Canyon Fire, please describe how USFS protocols for informing and engaging with the public about proposed or planned burns have changed? Do you plan to continue those updated protocols indefinitely? Is the USFS only using these updated protocols in New Mexico, or nationwide?

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you for that opening statement, Chief Moore.

The Chair will now recognize Members for 5 minutes for their questions, and I would like to start with a few questions here.

Chief Moore, the Forest Service's Fiscal Year 2024 budget includes a \$3 million cut to landscape-scale restoration projects, while increasing electric vehicle charging infrastructure by over \$60 million.

Regarding the \$3 million cut, your own budget justification states, and I will quote here, "This decrease would reduce the number of projects with tribes, states, and other eligible partners by 12 projects, and result in reduced land treatment and restoration activities on non-Federal lands, based on prior-year performance data. It would reduce planned funding for tribes by \$1 million, which is one of 10 key priorities identified in the USDA Equity Action Plan. Past performance of projects supported by the Landscape Scale Restoration Program have demonstrated success in reducing wildland fire risk, improving forest conditions, and mitigating impacts from insects and disease, and leveraging public and private resources."

Why is the Forest Service prioritizing funding for electric vehicles over wildfire mitigation efforts for tribes?

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, I am not sure that we are prioritizing the use of electric vehicles over any other part of our programs. I think what we are trying to recognize is a growing trend that we are seeing across America, and that growing trend, based on visitors that we are seeing coming to national forests, is that more of our visitors are having electric vehicles, and this is an opportunity to provide them the ability to plug in when they visit, particularly our more popular sites. So, it is a small opportunity to try to address all people's connection to the land, which I mentioned in my opening statement.

Mr. TIFFANY. But, Chief, wouldn't you say you can tell a person's priorities by how they spend their money?

You are spending 20 times as much on electric vehicle charging infrastructure, which is basically a gas pump. And we normally have businesses purchase their own gas pumps, and here we are going to spend this on the electric vehicle gas pump, and reduce the amount of spending for landscape restoration projects, including for tribal entities, which I thought was a priority.

Mr. MOORE. It is a priority. And Congressman, you mentioned in your opening statement that hazardous fuel reduction is less than last year. But last year, our enacted amount was about \$207 million, and this year it is really at \$322 million. So, we are not seeing a reduction in hazardous fuel treatments, we are seeing an increase in our opportunities to treat more of these acres on the landscape.

Because we have all recognized that we have an emergency situation out there, and we need to be doing more work rather than less work, so our efforts are really aimed at increasing the amount of work that we are doing on these landscapes.

Mr. TIFFANY. When we met recently, we talked about a bill called the ACRES Act, where we want to get an accurate amount of what hazardous fuels reduction is going on by the Forest Service. And I will give you a quick example.

The Forest Service's Initial Landscape Investments Progress Summary reported 132,000 acres have been treated in 4FRI priority landscape in Arizona last year. However, the regional Forest Service reports only 88,000 acres were treated last year. How do you account for the discrepancy of over 43,000 acres in that situation? Where you are counting the higher number, the regional people are sending a lower number.

Mr. MOORE. The data I have, Congressman, is that we are actually treating almost 4 million acres per year. In fact, last year we treated about 3.7 million acres. When I look at what our plans are this year that we are in, and I have met with all the regional foresters, we are planning to treat about 4 million acres this year. And we meet monthly. In fact, as soon as this meeting is over, I am going to be going to Colorado to meet with all of the regional foresters and my deputy chief to look at our ability to treat more of these acres. But so far, they have projected to be at 4 million acres treated this year.

Mr. TIFFANY. If I could ask one more question before my time is up, it is really concerning that the agency is inflating progress here

when you see these discrepancies. Last fiscal year, the Forest Service sold roughly 2.9 billion board feet of timber, which is down over 10 percent compared to pre-pandemic levels. What steps are you taking to increase the amount of timber harvested on Forest Service lands?

First of all, is it acceptable to continue to see this decrease to you?

Mr. MOORE. Am I allowed to answer? We ran out of time.

Mr. TIFFANY. You go ahead and answer it, sir.

Mr. MOORE. So, for context, over the last 3 years we have been right at about 3 million board feet a year. In 2022, we were at about 2.8 million. We increased that last year to about 2.9. This year, we are looking to be somewhere around 3.4 billion board feet. Our goal is to get at 4 billion board feet by 2027, I believe.

So, we are on an increase in the amount of timber that we are planning to produce, and that is a part of what I was mentioning earlier. We have added accountability in the system, and that is one of the reasons I meet with all of the senior line officers in the agency on a monthly basis to look at what those challenges are, and what is it that we need to do to eliminate those challenges.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is the reduction acceptable?

Mr. MOORE. No, and I am not seeing a reduction.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, OK. We will do some follow-up questions.

Mr. MOORE. May I follow up, Congressman?

There are many things that get in the way of what we are able to do. Fires sometimes burn through areas where we have already gone out and did sale prep. Litigation is another one of those areas that sometimes limits our ability to accomplish what our targets and goals are. So, there are other things that get in the way of us accomplishing that. But the work on the ground is occurring, but there are other things that get in the way of actually getting to the bottom line.

Mr. TIFFANY. I recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes.

Mr. Levin.

Mr. LEVIN. I am not Mr. Neguse.

Mr. TIFFANY. Welcome.

Mr. LEVIN. It is good to be with you. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany.

Before diving into my questions, I wanted to note something exceptional that happened in last night's Rules Committee meeting that you may have missed. After promising repeatedly that he wouldn't change the Default on America Act, as we are calling it, before it hit the Floor, Speaker McCarthy did make concessions and ended up altering the underlying bill. But notably for our Committee's work, there is now a proposal to strike the \$200 million that Congress passed in the Inflation Reduction Act to carry out deferred maintenance projects at the National Park Service.

This change is particularly hypocritical to me, given the Committee hearing that we had here last week with NPS Director Sams, where the Majority highlighted the need to address NPS's deferred maintenance backlog, something that I agree with. And I think if we are all serious about protecting our public lands, we should be investing in addressing the maintenance backlog, as well

as other key priorities of our land management agencies, not rolling back the funding that we have already provided to maintain our public lands.

So, I urge everybody interested in this, let's push back against those funding cuts. Let's make sure that that doesn't wind up in any final package here. With that, let me turn to a question of wildfires.

Chief Moore, I want to thank you for your testimony today. I think you know that California over the last 5 years has suffered from seven of the largest fires in our state's history, including the August Complex Fire, Dixie Fire, Monument Fire, Caldor Fire, Beckwourth Complex Fire. They collectively burned over 2.5 million acres, destroyed or damaged over 30,000 structures. And we know that we are not just preparing for a fire season, but for fires year-round.

This risk is only going to continue to increase. The U.N. Environment Program recently found the likelihood of extreme wildfires is expected to increase up to 14 percent by 2030 and up to 50 percent by 2100 as a result of both climate change and changes in land use. And due to this ever-increasing risk, Federal land management agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service have had to spend significantly larger portions of their budgets on fire suppression, which can limit their ability to fund critical restoration and management activities that can improve ecosystem health and resilience.

I am very pleased to see the Forest Service has taken a comprehensive approach to wildfire management through this 10-year wildfire crisis strategy. And based on the historic investments in the Inflation Reduction Act, I am glad that your Fiscal Year 2024 budget request seeks an additional \$2.97 billion for wildland fire management, an operational increase of \$674 million, including by boosting funding for restoration and management activities. I am very grateful for your continued prioritization of wildland fire management funding, as we know that an ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure.

Chief Moore, recognizing that wildfire risk continues to grow, how is the Forest Service working with partners, particularly the scientific community, to define project goals and track outcomes for its wildfire crisis strategy in a way that we can clearly communicate to the public?

Mr. MOORE. Thank you for the comments, Congressman. If I can try to kind of describe the situation we find ourselves in, you had mentioned as you closed your question there about outcomes. We are reporting outputs, and we are looking at acres achieved, amount of timber cut.

And I think perhaps it may be time to look at a different way of reporting, because we are trying to be transparent. We want to be transparent to Congress. And there is a question on the table that basically says you are double-counting and triple-counting some of the same acres treated, and that is not our intent. So, I would submit perhaps it is time for us to look at a different way of reporting in terms of outcomes on the landscape and communities protected as a potential outcome of our treatments.

We have also indicated that there is a lot of value in these public lands, and there is a lot at risk right now between an explosion of

homes in the wildland urban interface. There is climate change. Depending on where you are on this issue, it is taking place. We have disease and insects that are affecting our forests. And we have an infrastructure that is based on the 100 years of how we have operated and how we have utilized some of the material off national forests.

So, our job is not to take away from that traditional infrastructure, but how do we add to this existing infrastructure to utilize the material that we have to really get at mitigating the fires that are taking place on the landscape?

For instance, wood innovations, how do we bring in things like cross-laminated timber, biochar as opportunities to use small-diameter, low-value material, which now, by and large, we pile it and burn it? We want to introduce wood innovations into the system so that we can help create jobs in our small rural communities, and provide another economic stimulus, if you will, into these communities.

It is very important that we remove a lot of vegetation off the landscape, because it is a major contributor to fires, disease, and insects. But we have to have markets, and we have to take advantage, from an economic standpoint, to incentivize not only the industry, but new people to move in and utilize this type of material.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you. I am out of time, but thank you for your answer. Thank you for your service.

And I will yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would like to recognize the Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, Mr. Westerman, for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, and thank you, Chief, for being here today and for your testimony. I know you and I have a lot of common interests. You mentioned markets for wood products. I think that is extremely important. And I think there are a lot of areas we can work together on to make our Federal lands more productive, make our forests more healthy, which will be beneficial all the way around.

But as we are here to talk about your budget today, one item I saw in there was that the Forest Service budget proposes taking \$1.6 million from hazardous fuels reduction and \$6 million from wildfire preparedness for electric vehicles, which is a total of nearly \$8 million. Chief, was that your decision, or did that come from above?

Mr. MOORE. So, maybe I can talk about the thinking behind that decision.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I have to move quickly. I just need to know, was that your decision or did somebody else—

Mr. MOORE. Well, Congressman, I support that decision.

Mr. WESTERMAN. OK. I am going to just move on, then.

There has been some recent research showing how much carbon catastrophic wildfires are emitting into the atmosphere. Are you familiar with the amount of carbon that was emitted during California's record-breaking 2020 wildfire season?

Mr. MOORE. Not confidently that I would want to testify here today, but I am familiar with it in general.

Mr. WESTERMAN. It is roughly 127 million metric tons.

Do you know how many EVs the Forest Service would need to buy in order to offset 127 million metric tons of carbon emissions?

Mr. MOORE. How much?

Mr. WESTERMAN. Well, based on the back-of-the-napkin or back-of-the-envelope calculations I did, and some data from MIT that, Mr. Chairman, I ask to submit this report to the record——

Mr. TIFFANY. So ordered.

[The information follows:]

ARE ELECTRIC VEHICLES DEFINITELY BETTER FOR THE CLIMATE THAN GAS-POWERED CARS?

Yes: although electric cars' batteries make them more carbon-intensive to manufacture than gas cars, they more than make up for it by driving much cleaner under nearly any conditions.

MIT Climate Portal, October 13, 2022 by Andrew Moseman, MIT Climate Portal Writing Team

<https://climate.mit.edu/ask-mit/are-electric-vehicles-definitely-better-climate-gas-powered-cars>

Although many fully electric vehicles (EVs) carry “zero emissions” badges, this claim is not quite true. Battery-electric cars may not emit greenhouse gases from their tailpipes, but some emissions are created in the process of building and charging the vehicles. Nevertheless, says Sergey Paltsev, Deputy Director of the MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change, electric vehicles are clearly a lower-emissions option than cars with internal combustion engines. Over the course of their driving lifetimes, EVs will create fewer carbon emissions than gasoline-burning cars under nearly any conditions.

“We shouldn’t claim victory that with this switch to electric cars, problem solved, we are going to have zero emissions,” he says. “No, that’s not the case. But electric cars are actually much, much better in terms of the impact on the climate in comparison to internal combustion vehicles. And in time, that comparative advantage of electric cars is going to grow.”

One source of EV emissions is the creation of their large lithium-ion batteries. The use of minerals including lithium, cobalt, and nickel, which are crucial for modern EV batteries, requires using fossil fuels to mine those materials and heat them to high temperatures. As a result, building the 80 kWh lithium-ion battery found in a Tesla Model 3 creates between 2.5 and 16 metric tons of CO₂ (exactly how much depends greatly on what energy source is used to do the heating).¹ This intensive battery manufacturing means that building a new EV can produce around 80% more emissions than building a comparable gas-powered car.²

But just like with gasoline cars, most emissions from today’s EVs come after they roll off the production floor.³ The major source of EV emissions is the energy used to charge their batteries. These emissions, says Paltsev, vary enormously based on where the car is driven and what kind of energy is used there. The best case scenario looks like what’s happening today in Norway, Europe’s largest EV market: the nation draws most of its energy from hydropower, giving all those EVs a minuscule carbon footprint. In countries that get most of their energy from burning dirty coal, the emissions numbers for EVs don’t look nearly as good—but they’re still on par with or better than burning gasoline.

To illustrate how EVs create fewer emissions than their counterparts, Paltsev points to MIT’s Insights Into Future Mobility study from 2019.⁴ This study looked at comparable vehicles like the Toyota Camry and Honda Clarity across their gasoline, hybrid, plug-in hybrid, battery electric, and hydrogen fuel cell configurations. The researchers found that, on average, gasoline cars emit more than 350 grams of CO₂ per mile driven over their lifetimes. The hybrid and plug-in hybrid versions, meanwhile, scored at around 260 grams per mile of carbon dioxide, while the fully battery-electric vehicle created just 200 grams. Stats from the U.S. Department of

Energy tell a similar story: Using the nationwide average of different energy sources, DOE found that EVs create 3,932 lbs. of CO₂ equivalent per year, compared to 5,772 lbs. for plug-in hybrids, 6,258 lbs. for typical hybrids, and 11,435 lbs. for gasoline vehicles.⁵

MIT's report shows how much these stats can swing based on a few key factors. For example, when the researchers used the average carbon intensity of America's power grid, they found that a fully electric vehicle emits about 25 percent less carbon than a comparable hybrid car. But if they ran the numbers assuming the EV would charge up in hydropower-heavy Washington State, they found it would emit 61 percent less carbon than the hybrid. When they did the math for coal-heavy West Virginia, the EV actually created more carbon emissions than the hybrid, but still less than the gasoline car.

In fact, Paltsev says, it's difficult to find a comparison in which EVs fare worse than internal combustion. If electric vehicles had a shorter life span than gas cars, that would hurt their numbers because they would have fewer low-emissions miles on the road to make up for the carbon-intensive manufacture of their batteries. Yet when the MIT study calculated a comparison in which EVs lasted only 90,000 miles on the road rather than 180,000 miles, they remained 15 percent better than a hybrid and far better than a gas car.

And while internal combustion engines are getting more efficient, EVs are poised to become greener by leaps and bounds as more countries add more clean energy to their mix. MIT's report sees gasoline cars dropping from more than 350 grams of CO₂ per mile to around 225 grams by the year 2050. In that same span, however, battery EVs could drop to around 125 grams, and perhaps even down to 50 grams if the price of renewable energy were to drop significantly.

"Once we decarbonize the electric grid—once we get more and more clean sources to the grid—the comparison is getting better and better," Paltsev says.

Footnotes

¹ These figures are derived from comparison of three recent reports that conducted broad literature reviews of studies attempting to quantify battery manufacturing emissions across different countries, energy mixes, and time periods from the early 2010s to the present. We discard one outlier study from 2016 whose model suggested emissions from manufacturing the battery in our example could total as high as almost 40 metric tons. The lowest estimates typically come from studies of U.S. and European battery manufacturing, while the highest come from studies of Chinese and other East Asian battery manufacturing—which is consistent with the different energy mixes in these regions.

² This estimate comes from Argonne National Laboratory's GREET (Greenhouse gases, Regulated Emissions, and Energy use in Technologies) Model, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy. It assumes comparable models of EV and gas-powered car, and that the EV has a battery with a range of 300 miles, similar to a Tesla Model 3. Different assumptions about battery manufacture would offer different comparisons; in this model, the battery of the EV entails close to 12 metric tons of CO₂ emissions.

³ Using the same GREET figures as above, manufacturing and end-of-life disposal account for around 9% of a gas car's emissions, and around 29% of an EV's (more than half of which comes from the battery alone). A plug-in hybrid EV is in the middle at around 17%. This analysis assumes the EV is charged with the average emissions intensity of the U.S. electric grid; that all cars drive around 173,000 miles in their lifetime; and that the gas car gets 30.7 miles to the gallon.

⁴ MIT Energy Initiative: Insights Into Future Mobility, November 2019.

⁵ U.S. Department of Energy Alternative Fuels Data Center: Emissions from Electric Vehicles. Accessed October 13, 2022.

Mr. WESTERMAN [continuing]. And the Federal Highway Administration, the number comes up to 62.8 million EVs to offset 127 million metric tons of carbon that would otherwise be emitted from internal combustion engine cars.

Do you know the size of the entire Forest Service vehicle fleet?

[No response.]

Mr. WESTERMAN. It is 18,284 vehicles. I did a lot of research for you here.

Given the fact that the Forest Service would need to purchase almost 3,500 times more the amount of vehicles it currently owns in order to offset emissions from one state in one year, from a carbon perspective, does it make sense to you that the Forest Service is taking money away from preventing megafires, instead of directing that money toward purchasing EVs?

Mr. MOORE. I am sorry, I missed the—

Mr. WESTERMAN. Does it make sense to purchase EVs instead of doing forest management when you look at the big climate picture?

Mr. MOORE. I think the whole picture is a bit more complex, Congressman, because it is not to replace all of our vehicles with electric vehicles. It is really looking at what portion that we may be able to replace because, as you know, depending on where you are and the type of landscapes that we drive our vehicles, electric vehicles probably will not work in all of our locations.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I get all of that. I just think diverting \$8 million from catastrophic wildfire to electric vehicles is a waste of taxpayer money. And it is more of a messaging than it is actually doing something to help the forest.

Also, you all put a report out last week that talked a lot about mature and old-growth forest. I went to forestry school, and I don't remember any definition of mature or old-growth forest, yet the Forest Service is trying to define that now. Can you tell me, briefly, what a mature or an old-growth forest is?

Mr. MOORE. When we looked at defining, from a definition standpoint, what old growth is, as you know, it depends on the species in terms of what defines an old growth. But if we could just talk plain here for a moment, it is those older trees and, like I say, depending on the species, but you are looking at trees 80 years or older in many of the species.

Now, the report that was put out had to do with mature and old growth. And we were required under executive order to do an inventory.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, it was an executive order that required you to inventory something that science hasn't really been able to define. And I am sorry to cut you off, but in that report on old growth it states that "narrative frameworks are going to inform the policy and practice of forest management for old growth."

The report also includes the following: "The role of place, attachment, or identity, meaning the symbolic importance of a place as a repository for emotions and relationships that give meaning and purpose to life, may also be particularly relevant in our understanding of how people relate to and value old-growth forest." If that didn't make any sense, I read it over and over and over last night, and it still doesn't make any sense to me.

Chief, I know your heart is in the right place, and you want to do the right thing. Let's just get busy managing our forests, making them more fire resilient like I know you want to, getting those markets out there so that we can do management. And I will support you any way I can in that.

And, again, thank you for your testimony, and I look forward to working with you going forward.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Chairman yields. Next, I would like to recognize the gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Leger Fernández.

You have 5 minutes.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you so much, Chairman.

Chief Moore, one year ago, the Forest Service started not one, but two fires in my district in the beautiful forest and watersheds of my home in the old-growth forest that meant so much to us. Families lost their homes, their ranches, their livelihoods. Congress passed my Hermits Peak Canyon Fire Act to provide nearly \$4 billion to help New Mexicans recover. But the pain of losing so much, it is not going to go away.

Chief Moore, victims in New Mexico are watching us today. What do you have to say to them?

Mr. MOORE. Congresswoman, I want to acknowledge right up front the extraordinary impacts that these events have had on the people and on the different communities there in New Mexico. And really, being a professional for so many years working for the Forest Service and seeing this happen time and time again, my heart really bleeds for the communities to see what is taking place on our different landscapes.

So, just know that I and our employees within the agency are committed to doing community protection. We are committed to trying to reduce the amount of hazardous fuel that we have on those landscapes because we have seen the impact that it has. In fact, a lot of our employees live in these same communities.

So, what I want you to know is that we care. We have committed a life to trying to protect these areas. But the conditions on the ground—

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. So, thank you. I mean, I think a good apology would be a nice place to start.

But you also reviewed the New Mexico fires and acknowledged you did not use the resources needed to monitor your prescribed burns. We were using resources to fight fires, but not resources when you start the fires, which doesn't make sense. You left the Calf Canyon fire smoldering for months. Everyone who has been camping knows you never leave the fire until it is out. And we left the fire. You acknowledge that use of technologies like infrared drones could have stopped this from happening. However, my constituents have been told on the ground from Forest Service personnel that we will use those drones until they are needed elsewhere.

Chief Moore, there is no room for error. Will you commit to me that you are going to use all the resources needed at prescribed burns, including drones, to make sure the fire is out?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congresswoman, I will certainly commit myself and the agency to that. But keep in mind that that particular fire had snow on it. It had rain on it a couple of times, and we did think that it was out.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. But when it started up again, you went to the fire, and it was monitored, and then they left before it had been extinguished. And it was the conflagration of the two fires which destroyed thousands and thousands of acres, the largest wildfire we have ever seen.

I secured an outside independent investigation through GAO on the use of prescribed burns. Chief Moore, yes or no, when the GAO report is released, can we count on you to work with my office and the GAO to implement its recommendations to improve our policies for prescribed burns?

Because I wanted to make sure we had an outside look in. I know you have done some work, but will you commit to working with us to implement those?

Mr. MOORE. Congresswoman, I will always commit to working with you.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. So, I was at the Rules Committee until 3 a.m. last night, together, how is it that we ended up having two from Resources of the four Democrats on Rules. We were there until 3 a.m. We were fighting Republicans' plan to default on America, to hold our country hostage until we agreed to a 22 percent cut from the agencies. Those cuts are going to be disastrous, disastrous for people at USDA, cutting rural programs, throwing families out of their homes, tossing them out of Medicaid and nutrition programs.

But they are going to really do a lot of harm, a lot of harm to your agency. What would that reduction do to your ability to pay firefighters and to respond to the wildfires that we all know are going to erupt? They are going to erupt not because of prescribed burns, but because we are in a historic drought caused by climate crisis. Tell us what it would do.

Mr. MOORE. Let me first say that whatever Congress decides to pass, we are going to do our best to meet its intent.

Secondly, if there are reductions from where we are now, what you will see is a continuation of us losing firefighters. You will see a continued reduction in our ability to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfires out on the landscape. But if that is Congress' decision, then we are going to do everything we can to meet its intent.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Chief Moore, I have run out of time, but I will submit a written question and ask that you respond to how we are going to be dealing with the burn scar. We know that you are working on seeding and reforestation, because we are going to have horrible flooding, right?

We saw it last time. We have snow and we have fast snowmelt. I want you to respond to how you are going to be working with all the Federal agencies on a coordinated basis for the private lands, as well as the Federal.

Thank you. My time is up.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Mr. LAMBORN [presiding]. Thank you.

Chief Moore, it is great to have you here. Thanks for your testimony and for coming before the Committee. It is great to have Chairman Westerman here today. He has forgotten more about forestry than most of us will ever know, yourself excluded in that, of course.

I am going to ask a background question, Chief, and then a legal question that I am very interested in.

First of all, though, while I appreciate the attention paid to wildfire in the budget, I am concerned that this money won't translate to reduced fires for reasons I will get into in a minute. The Pike and San Isabel National Forests in or near my district have a tree stand density of 250 to 300 trees per acre. A healthy forest should have roughly 50 to 80 trees per acre.

In the fall 2020, Colorado saw the two largest wildfires in state history: the Cameron Peak Fire and the East Troublesome Fire. Despite robust Federal funding, fuel material continues to pile up on Federal lands. So, Chief, what methodology does the Forest Service use to decide the appropriate level of fuel material and tree stand density on any given land?

Mr. MOORE. What we are trying to mimic, Congressman, and by the way, thanks for that question, it is very informed.

And in many places outside of Colorado, we have even more trees per acre than what you mentioned is 300. In fact, we have 600-plus in some of our locations across the West. And if we want to mimic conditions in the past, where we want to get down to somewhere between 40 and 80 trees per acre, that is a dilemma, but it is also an opportunity for us, working with the communities and our state partners, to say, "How do we come up with a plan, collectively, collaterally, and how do we take advantage of the opportunities we have now?"

If you look at the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, we have a lot of opportunities there, and it is a great opportunity for us to engage with our community leaders, state, tribal, and other Federal partners to look at what do we do here.

And I mentioned earlier in my opening statement about wood innovations, and it is an opportunity there to create new economic opportunities in many of our small, rural communities. But we want to do that with our communities, and we want to be able to sit down with them, so it is not the Forest Service dictating or deciding what we do and how we provide these opportunities, but it is us sitting around the table with others to say, OK, here is our challenge, let's pursue opportunities together.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK, thank you. And I wish you all the success on that.

Now to the legal issue that I think is a major obstacle to achieving this goal. The President's budget requests hundreds of millions of dollars for wildfire treatment, despite the fact that both the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Infrastructure and Jobs Act each gave Federal agencies billions of dollars for wildfire management. Despite clear congressional authority to remove this fuel, agencies refuse to do it for fear of lawsuits.

In the 2018 farm bill, categorical exclusions were signed into law that would allow all Federal agencies to remove dead and dying trees without an Environmental Impact Statement or assessment.

This opened up hundreds of millions of acres to wildfire fuel reduction, but only a few hundred thousand acres have been treated.

A copy of the Forest Service Handbook specifically states that the Forest Service will not use fuel-related categorical exclusions because of the 2007 appellate court case *Sierra Club v. Bosworth*, a 9th Circuit decision in which Sierra Club sued the Federal Service for trying to remove dead trees, even after they had been burned in a wildfire.

And I would like to submit this handbook language into the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

NEPA HANDBOOK—CHAPTER 30—CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION FROM DOCUMENTATION

WD AMENDMENT 1909.15-2014-1 EFFECTIVE DATE: 05/28/2014 DURATION: This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.	1909.15_30 Page 11 of 22
FSH 1909.15 - NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT HANDBOOK CHAPTER 30 - CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION FROM DOCUMENTATION	

(8) Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads. Examples include but are not limited to:

- (i) Authorizing geophysical investigations which use existing roads that may require incidental repair to reach sites for drilling core holes, temperature gradient holes, or seismic shot holes;
- (ii) Gathering geophysical data using shot hole, vibroseis, or surface charge methods;
- (iii) Trenching to obtain evidence of mineralization;
- (iv) Clearing vegetation for sight paths or from areas used for investigation or support facilities;
- (v) Redesigning or rearranging surface facilities within an approved site;
- (vi) Approving interim and final site restoration measures; and
- (vii) Approving a plan for exploration which authorizes repair of an existing road and the construction of 1/3 mile of temporary road; clearing vegetation from an acre of land for trenches, drill pads, or support facilities.

Cite this category as 36 CFR 220.6(c)(8)

(9) Implementation or modification of minor management practices to improve allotment condition or animal distribution when an allotment management plan is not yet in place. Examples include but are not limited to:

- (i) Rebuilding a fence to improve animal distribution;
- (ii) Adding a stock watering facility to an existing water line; and
- (iii) Spot seeding native species of grass or applying lime to maintain forage condition.

Cite this category as 36 CFR 220.6(c)(9)

(10) Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire, not to exceed 4,500 acres; and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing, not to exceed 1,000 acres. Such activities:

(i) Shall be limited to areas:

(A) In the wildland-urban interface; or

(B) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, H, or III, outside the wildland-urban interface.

(ii) Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in "A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and Environment 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan";

WFO AMENDMENT 1909.15-2014-1 EFFECTIVE DATE: 05/28/2014 DURATION: This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.	1909.15_30 Page 12 of 22
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**FSH 1909.15 - NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT HANDBOOK
CHAPTER 30 - CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION FROM DOCUMENTATION**

~~(iii) Shall be conducted consistent with Agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans;~~

~~(iv) Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness; and~~

~~(v) Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure and may include the sale of vegetative material if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction.~~

"[T]he Forest Service is enjoined from implementing the Fuels CE pending its issuance of a new decision that is consistent with the Court's opinion in *Sierra Club v. Bosworth*, 510 F.3d 1016 (9th Cir. 2007) and that complies with 40 C.F.R. §1507.3 (including prior public notice and comment)." *Sierra Club v. Bosworth*, No. 04-2114 (E.D. Cal. November 25, 2008). Unless and until the Agency complies with these requirements, **this category is not to be used**. See also the Chief's 1570-1 memo dated December 1, 2008.

(11) Post-fire rehabilitation activities, not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration, heritage site restoration, repair of roads and trails, and repair of damage to minor facilities such as campgrounds), to repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire. Such activities:

- (i) Shall be conducted consistent with Agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans;
- (ii) Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and
- (iii) Shall be completed within 3 years following a wildland fire.

Cite this category as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(11)

(12) Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. Do not use this category for even-aged regeneration harvest or vegetation type conversion. The proposed action may include incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing. Examples include but are not limited to:

- (i) Removal of individual trees for sawlogs, specialty products, or fuelwood, and
- (ii) Commercial thinning of overstocked stands to achieve the desired stocking level to increase health and vigor.

Cite this category as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(12)

Mr. LAMBORN. So, Chief Moore, is the Forest Service still prevented from carrying out fuel removal using categorical exclusions because of the appellate *Bosworth* decision?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. Congressman, litigation is what it is, and it is a part of our society. So, let me say what we are doing, if I can.

Mr. LAMBORN. No, no. Talk about the *Bosworth* decision, if you would.

Mr. MOORE. Well, what I want to talk about, though, is to answer that by letting you know what we have been doing, and how we have adjusted, based on litigation.

Right now, 85 percent of our environmental assessments are done through categorical exclusions, and that is about 4,000 on an annual basis. So, we are using categorical exclusion to the tune of about 85 percent of our NEPA documentation. That is what I was talking about, streamlining or finding new efficiencies, regardless of litigation. We are working with our communities and partners to streamline this.

One other piece I might add here is that the Secretary has given us emergency authorities to use, particularly in the wildfire crisis strategy, on 28 million acres that is considered in these landscapes, these fire sheds. To date, we have had eight requests to come in to use this authority. We have approved six of them. So, we are moving out on trying to create lots of opportunities to remove a lot of that vegetation using our partners, both at the state, Federal, tribal, and non-profit level.

Mr. LAMBORN. Well, Chief, I am glad that you are using some of those various tools. I wish that you had the opportunity to use even more.

I question whether *Bosworth* at the 9th Circuit should be applied in a state like Colorado, which is in the 10th Circuit. But beyond that, in the 2018 farm bill, Congress and the President passed legislation saying use it in this context. And the Forest Service is specifically saying, because of a previous case predating the legislation in 2018, we are not going to even touch it, we are not going to even go there. So, I really question that approach, Chief, and I wish you would look into that, and hopefully change that.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, thank you, Congressman.

May I just say, too, though, that, based on my experiences, I have found that when we debate and argue over litigation, we paralyze ourselves from action. And my intent is to not allow the agency to get paralyzed over talking about things that they have no control over.

What we are going to do is look at the writing on the wall, if you will, and how do we need to strategize to still be effective, in spite of the challenges that we have. And that is where we are today, and that is why I built a lot of accountability in our system, and that is why I am meeting with all of the regional forests' deputy chiefs on a monthly basis to look at what are those challenges and what are we going to do to mitigate those challenges.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you. The gentlelady, Ranking Member, is recognized.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, and thank you, Chief Moore, for attending this Committee hearing and answering some questions.

I come from California. I feel like we are the wildfire capital of the United States. And part of fire risk management, I believe, is personnel and having enough folks to fight the fires. As a State Senator, I actually worked with the Fire and Forestry Restoration Program, which pipelines men and women who worked under Cal Fire while they were in prison into permanent firefighter positions.

And I would love it if you could speak to the need to appropriately fund permanent firefighter positions, so that we have the kind of personnel that we need on an ongoing annual basis, year-round to fight these fires.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congresswoman. In fact, in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget there is a request in there to hire about 970 additional firefighters for that reason. We are also looking at converting some of our seasonals or temporaries into permanent, full-time.

Our plan is to have about 11,300 firefighters on board. As of this morning, as I was looking at what we currently have staffed, I think we have about 7,900, and that is the most that we have had at this time of the year since about 2018. And a part of that is because of what Congress has provided so far, and that is a temporary salary bump that our firefighters have received. So, we have less attrition in our firefighter ranks because of that temporary fix.

But now, if this fix is not permanent, we will see a continuation of what we were seeing in the past because when you compare what a wildland firefighter gets in the Federal Service, it is two times, sometimes three times less than what some states and some county and local fire departments get for the same work.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you for that. I also represent Los Angeles. We don't have many, if any, forests in Los Angeles, although we do have some beautiful ones across my state. Can you talk about the work that you are doing to introduce forestry into urban areas, especially into urban communities that might not have the access that some communities might that are more rural?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. In fact, as you look at our urban forest program and how we are trying to connect within these urban areas, we have about \$1 billion to look at urban forestry kinds of things.

A part of that is to look at how do we go into these urban areas and talk about the value of planting trees. What is the value of trees, and what impact or effect does it have on your utility bill? What is the impact that you have in some of our communities in our urban areas, where you don't have many trees? And where we have explored that with some of our non-profit partners, we have seen a huge difference.

In the Los Angeles area, as a matter of fact, where we have put in what we call pocket parks or alleyways, green alleyways, and where you bring birds back into the communities, and what a spiritual well-being that is for the communities. So, we have seen that with partners before with few dollars, and now that we have a few extra dollars, our intent is to introduce more of that.

But it is also the land stewards in the area. Everyone is not going to come out to the national forests, so how can you appreciate land steward ethics, and how do you improve your land ethics from where you are, no matter where that is, whether it is in the rural areas or in our populated urban areas?

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you so much for that. I just have to say that I also have the Baldwin Hills Conservancy in my district. We have Kenny Hahn Park. It is a county park. But we have been doing a lot of work to connect trails to one another, to focus on watershed projects, to look at water harvesting and conservation, to look at the protection and the expansion of those lands, to look at connectivity between them and the urban communities that surround them, and expand them in smaller ways, but still meaningful ways across the county because you can be in an urban center and still care about the environment.

I want to say to folks who are in rural communities that these issues are also important to folks that live in the big city.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, you are absolutely right, Congresswoman. As a matter of fact, down in the Los Angeles area, the San Bernardino area, we are looking at planning, regional planning. So, regardless of the landownership boundaries or jurisdictional boundaries, how do we give the public a complete experience?

So, rather than the county or city planning a trail and it stops at Forest Service boundary, how do we include the Forest Service and look at that complete experience and a better experience by doing planning for that region, regardless of jurisdiction boundaries. We are moving in that direction now to really get at improving the experience that our publics have with the outdoors, period.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Great, thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY [presiding]. The gentlelady yields. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Utah, Mr. Curtis, for 5 minutes.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CURTIS. OK, Mr. Chairman, I will be the one person today that sticks to my time.

[Laughter.]

Mr. CURTIS. Chief Moore, so pleased to have you here. My compliments to you in your demeanor and the way you have handled this. I appreciate your professionalism.

As opposed to the gentlelady from Los Angeles, I represent the 3rd Congressional District of Utah, where, as a state, 67 percent of our land is owned by the Federal Government. In my district, a number of counties are 90 percent federally owned. My district spans 400 miles top to bottom.

So, our relationship with you is just critical. And I am pleased to report that city, county, state leaders would have me thank you particularly for your men and women on the ground and our relationship with the Forest Service. You can imagine in my state how critical that relationship is, and I just want you to know we feel very good about the relationship, and a high compliment to your men and women in Utah who actually are boots on the ground and doing a great job. So, thank you very much for that.

Along that line, you have just rolled out the mature and old-growth forest initiative. Maybe you could comment just specifically how you see states and your agency interacting to both identify and then manage these areas.

Mr. CURTIS. Yes. So, Congressman, under the executive order we were required to do a few things. And I will just mention one was to do an inventory. We have to know what is out there. The next step is really to do an assessment of the risk associated with that. And then the third step of that, in order to make that happen, is really engage our publics and our friends into this process, so that it is not something that we are doing without public involvement and public input. And that is where we are now.

And I don't know if there is a full understanding of what this actually says, but it does allow management in these areas. It doesn't preclude that, because we all know that where we are not doing management—

Mr. CURTIS. Just for the sake of time, I am just going to leave that footnote with you that, of course, the state of Utah would love to be deeply involved in both identifying and managing those areas.

Let's talk about fire suppression. Obviously, a big topic today. The way a lot of these areas have been managed over the years has left a lot of undergrowth in the understudy. And, I think, traditionally, a lot of that in Utah has been, well, we need to have people come in and harvest this wood, and we would, of course, encourage that.

But I am also aware of efforts in Summit County to do a biomass biochar project, and would just love to draw your attention to that, and ask you to maybe look into that. That is not something we have done much of in Utah, and I think particularly in that county they would like to explore that and see if that can be part of the answer, as well.

Mr. MOORE. I would love to have the opportunity to visit with you on that, and the community there. And, in fact, the same thing and the same commitment I made to Congressman Westerman.

Mr. CURTIS. Great, excellent. Let me touch on the roadless rule.

There are lots of reasons why this is good, but then also has the ability to limit your ability to reach if you think about specifically my district, where we have just thousands and thousands of acres. Is there anything in your wildfire crisis strategy that looks at the roadless rule, and how to deal and access with these hard-to-reach areas?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I am not familiar on the extent across the country, but I do think that we have opportunities to manage a lot of these lands in some of these roadless areas.

We already have some roads in roadless areas, and if we are going to treat some of these lands we have to have access in and out. So, we are trying to see what are our opportunities in this designation.

Mr. CURTIS. I am going to make you a proposal that we would love to host you in Utah. As I have alluded to, our state is very different, right, than a lot of these areas. And to the extent your travel plans ever find you in Utah, we would love to host you and actually take you on the ground and see some of the difficulties that are unique to Utah in managing these forests. And we, you and I, could use that opportunity to also continue to foster the relationship between your agency and my state and local agencies.

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, during a meeting, I did commit to a lot of the county sups, county commissioners there to visit Utah. So, I am looking forward to it.

Mr. CURTIS. Good. Please coordinate with us. There are things we would love to show you while you are there. Thank you, Mr. Chief.

Mr. MOORE. Absolutely.

Mr. CURTIS. And Mr. Chairman, with 28 seconds left, I yield my time because I am sure there are other Members who would love to abuse the time.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. And since I used more than 28 seconds over my 5 minutes, we will count it toward that deficit. [Laughter.]

Mr. CURTIS. OK.

Mr. TIFFANY. Next, I would like to recognize the gentleman from Oregon, Mr. Bentz.

Mr. Bentz, you have 5 minutes.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Chief Moore, for being here today. Sadly, I don't have enough time to talk about all the issues. I will list the ones I am not going to talk about.

I won't be talking about the need to use our forests better for water retention.

I won't be talking about the First Peoples' opportunities to access the forest, because they can, and I hope we use more stewardship programs with them.

The years-long homeless problem around Bend, Oregon, where dozens, if not hundreds, of people have moved into Forest Service lands and won't leave.

The lack of proper notice to neighbors along Lemon Gulch in and around Prineville, Oregon.

The embarrassingly low amount of the timber harvest in the Western United States, and it is falling instead of going up.

The cost of treatment of land, which appears to be \$700 to \$2,000 per acre, which puts in perspective perhaps the millions that were mentioned earlier about treating our forests. And, of course, there are 90-some-odd million acres of forests in the Western United States that need help. So, you might want to add some scale to some of those things that you are mentioning today.

The one question I am going to ask before I go into an example of what I do want to talk about, which is accountability and respect for private property, which is not apparent in many of the fire-fighting operations that your agency either is in charge of or conducts, I will get to that in a second. But I would like you to tell us what it costs the Forest Service to fight fire per acre.

The number I have is \$914, which is about six times what is normal. Is that right? For putting a fire out, is that the cost per acre to put a fire out by your agency, \$914?

Mr. MOORE. I would like to see what all you are putting into that cost before I can commit on whether I think that is appropriate or not.

Mr. BENTZ. Yes, well, forget my number. What is yours?

Mr. MOORE. I don't really have a number on what it takes. I can tell you, generally, based on how we are funded and what it takes. But we have been spending \$2 billion on fire suppression alone.

Mr. BENTZ. I know you have been spending it. I want to know how you are spending it. In fact, that is what we are here for today. So, I will just ask you if you would please provide this Committee with the cost per acre for the Forest Service to put out a fire. The normal phrase is the Forest Service puts out fires by dumping money on them, and they continue to dump money on them until it rains or snows. Now, that is what is generally said. I hope it is not true, but I need the number.

I want to talk about October 19 of last year, up near Seneca, Oregon. That happens to be in my district. That actually is adjacent to one of my brother's ranching operations. And on that day, there was a prescribed burn started by your teams. Now, they gave, basically, a several-hours' notice to the permittee, who had

cattle on that exact space, not giving them time to get the cattle out. In fact, they could see cattle from the road where the fire was started. So, notice was an issue.

And there was also what I would call cheating on the humidity test. And the way you do this, if the humidity is too low in the space you are going to do the fire, you go somewhere else and you take a test some distance away, and that is how you get around it. And the rumor was heard over the radio that that is what was going on.

When the fire was started, there ensued a debate, shall we say, that is a nice word for it, between the property owners who saw that a week earlier when they had been in the same place, started the same fire, it had passed over a county highway, paved road, cars going back and forth, and started another bunch of fires. So, the question was, why in the world were they doing the same thing again, when nothing had changed? It was just as dry.

So, there ensued a rather heated discussion, so to speak, between the landowner and the Forest Service folks that were starting the fire and then controlling it. The sheriff arrived and put your Forest Service person under arrest, and took him away so that things did not escalate.

I saw your memos, and, Mr. Chair, I would like to offer them for the record, two of them, that you gave to your employees, saying how the employees were going to be supported, no matter what. Yet, we have videos, the sheriff does, and other recordings of what actually went on. Maybe you have seen them.

But my point here is there wasn't one word in your statements to your employees about the importance of being nice to the people adjacent to your land. And that lack of respect is reprehensible. It needs to change.

I am a total supporter of proper prescribed burns. That is the only way we are going to get rid of this huge amount of fuel. But you can't do it without proper respect. And when you are going to burn up fences and burn up other people's trees, about 100,000 board feet, they think, of the neighbor's property burned up, not a word said about how to pay for it, and immediately adjacent burning up fences between the cattle and roads, that can't happen.

I am sorry to have to go on. I am going to stop right now, Mr. Chair, because I don't want to further intrude upon time. But I must say this is extraordinarily important. I look forward to seeing the cost per acre.

Thank you, Chief Moore.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Per your request, we will enter that into the record. I see no objections.

[The information follows:]

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

NFFE NEWS RELEASE

November 2, 2022

**Union Condemns Wrongful Arrest of U.S. Forest Service Employee
for “Simply Doing His Job”**<https://nffe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-11-2-PR-Snodgrass-Arrest-final.pdf>

Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) strongly condemns the wrongful arrest of Rick Snodgrass, a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wildland firefighter who was working as an active “burn boss” when taken into sheriff’s custody on October 19, 2022. At the time of his arrest, Firefighter Snodgrass, an Assistant Fire Management Officer, was working as the incident commander overseeing fire operations and containment efforts during a prescribed burn on the Malheur National Forest in Grant County, Oregon. Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley arrested Firefighter Snodgrass during the burn operation after the fire unexpectedly jumped a roadway when the wind picked up, causing the fire to burn several acres of grasslands on private property.

NFFE National President Randy Erwin released the following statement after the arrest of USFS Firefighter Snodgrass:

“It is unconscionable that a local sheriff would arrest a working wildland firefighter during an active fire operation. Not only did the sheriff exceed his authority in detaining Firefighter Snodgrass, in doing so, the sheriff put everyone and everything in danger by removing a working fire commander during a dangerous incident. Firefighter Snodgrass was arrested for simply doing his job.

“We applaud all of the wildland firefighters on the line that day who held their focus despite the Sheriff’s interference. Undeterred, they worked together to contain the blaze and finish the job. Our firefighters who conduct and lead prescribed burns, like Firefighter Snodgrass, are highly trained professionals. They know how to manage the most dangerous situations. Prescribed burns are essential to keeping communities across this country safe from wildfires. When dealing with unpredictable environmental conditions, it is always possible that a prescribed burn could spill over into an untargeted area. Normally when this happens, the government will address any damages to affected parties as appropriate. It is not normal for a local sheriff to arrest a working fire commander during an incident. In doing so, the sheriff may have violated federal law that makes it a felony to interfere with a federal employee during their official duties, and the sheriff may have opened the county to massive liability for a civil rights violation for unlawfully detaining and removing Firefighter Snodgrass.

“Firefighter Snodgrass has the full, unconditional support of your union, as does every federal wildland firefighter across this country. NFFE is calling on state and federal authorities to investigate the reckless actions of Sheriff McKinley to pursue any violation of civil and criminal law. This incident will not be swept under the rug. There must be consequences for this unprecedented abuse of power and incredibly dangerous disruption to the critical work of the Forest Service.

“We applaud the USDA and the USFS for expressing their full support of Firefighter Snodgrass in the performance of his official duties. NFFE will continue to follow this investigation and provide support to Firefighter Snodgrass to ensure that rogue sheriffs or any other person who threatens or impedes public servants answer for their actions.”

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Chief Randy Moore

November 28, 2022

Update: Prescribed fire incident in Region 6<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/update-prescribed-fire-incident-region-6>

On October 21st I shared my thoughts with you about a concerning matter where one of our burn bosses was arrested while conducting official work duties. You may be seeing media coverage as this continues to unfold, and I want to be sure you are hearing directly from me.

First and foremost, we are doing everything we can to support our burn boss, Ricky Snodgrass. The matter is still under investigation by local authorities, and an attorney chosen by Ricky, with the help of the Department of Justice, will be representing him. One of our Code and Commitments is that we protect one another, and we will continue to do that here to ensure that Ricky is supported in every way and defended vigorously in court.

As you all know, this is an unprecedented situation. As it continues to play out, I want to personally assure you that Forest Service and USDA leaders are tracking it closely and staying engaged. To that end, I have appointed a Washington Office Fire and Aviation Management leader to act as liaison to guide and support Ricky through this difficult period. I want to reiterate what I said in my message a couple of weeks ago—you will always have my support when you are performing duties within the scope of your employment as a federal employee, and you can expect the same support from your regional and local leadership.

We know prescribed fire is an essential tool in our toolbox for reducing wildfire risk and protecting communities. I want to thank all of you who have worked so hard to get your unit's programs back online so we can begin prescribed burning at a time of year when we have some of our best windows. You are making a difference by doing the work that's needed right now—the right work in the right way.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields back. Next, I recognize the gentleman from Montana, Mr. Rosendale, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Chief Moore, thank you so much for joining us today. I am very concerned about forest management. It impacts air quality, water quality, the economy, and our way of life in Montana and throughout the country.

In 2022, more than 66,000 fires and more than 7 million acres burned across the country. In Montana alone, 125,000 acres burned in 2022. We need to do all that we can to combat wildfires out West. We have seen that, as timber sales at the Forest Service lands go down, the severity of the wildfires on those same lands increases. Throwing money at wildfire crisis alone is not going to solve the problem.

I just did a little bit of research, and according to the records, the National Forest Service budget in 1977 was \$2.2 billion. The revenue was \$2 billion. And we did not have nearly the amount of acres being burned in wildfires as we do today. It is incredible, the cause and effect that takes place. We were harvesting more timber. We were generating more revenue. It nearly covered the Forest

Service budget. It was a true win-win scenario, and there is a definite cause and effect that takes place.

Now, clearly, this is your problem to help us solve, but it is not a problem that was caused by you, and I do understand that. But you are the guy who happens to be here answering the questions today. And one of the things that you said earlier, I was sitting here listening, and you said litigation keeps you from meeting your goals. And I do believe that. I do believe that. As Chairman Westerman said, you have the best interests of the Forest Service at hand, and the forest.

I continue to be very concerned about the 2015 *Cottonwood* decision, particularly as the partial fix expired last month. As you know, the decision makes it so that if any new species are listed under the Endangered Species Act, a new critical habitat is designated, or more information becomes known about a species previously listed, the U.S. Forest Service must restore an already onerous consultation process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about how the information will impact both the forest plan and specific restoration projects.

Also, the Forest Service must follow different procedures, depending on where you actually operate.

So, my first question is how does it impact the Forest Service operations to have different requirements based on what Federal Circuit Court jurisdiction you operate in?

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, let me say first right off the bat that we do agree that the *Cottonwood* decision would be an impact on the agency. So, we really look forward to working with you on how to address this issue.

But if I was to look at right now, that decision basically says that we would have to reconsult on endangered species issue at the plan level. We feel that that is unnecessary, because we do that already at the site-specific project level. And to do that at the planning level is not necessary. And if we are required to do reconsultation at the planning level, I can tell you it is going to take over 10 years and tens of millions of dollars to do that. And we want to do that at a time where we are really trying to reduce the hazardous potential out there on the ground.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK. We are limited on our time. I want to get a couple more questions in.

So, if that would extend this consultation another 10 years, how long, on average, do the consultations take now with the Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

Mr. MOORE. It takes a long time, and it depends on the project, and it depends on the issues that we are trying to address.

Mr. ROSENDALE. A long time being 1 year, 2 years, 5 years?

Mr. MOORE. It could take all of that.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK.

Mr. MOORE. Or less.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK. Since the *Cottonwood* decision, do you know how many forest projects have been contested in Montana and/or the 9th Circuit?

Mr. MOORE. We just had a decision this week, I believe. OK, so we are not sure if they are *Cottonwood* or not, but we just had a decision this week that we are looking into.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK. The last count that I was able to get my hands on showed that we have 28 timber sales covering nearly 30,000 acres that are tied up right now being litigated in Montana. And, clearly, that is forest land that is not going to be managed properly and timber that is not going to be harvested. So, that is why we are trying to resolve this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am right down to it. I will yield back, thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. Next, I would like to recognize the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Gosar.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just last week, the Biden administration published a new executive order called, "Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All." While this Administration is spending copious amounts of time creating useless studies, new environmental justice scorecards that will, of course, end up with more regulatory burden and, of course, unfunded task forces and offices, real Americans continue to suffer. That is the actual injustice.

I recently had a chance to meet with the ranchers from my district and around the state. They work daily to bring us not only food to the table across the state and the country, but they also do something that is less talked about that I think is more important. They are true conservationists. Their work helps to improve the soil, the health of the rangeland, even working to manage wildlife and wildfire.

So, I do have a question for you, Chief Moore. In your role as Chief, yes or no, do you support the Rangeland Management Program?

Mr. MOORE. Of course I do.

Dr. GOSAR. So, if you support the Rangeland Management Program area, why is that support not translating into the investment of funds and resources?

Mr. MOORE. So, Congressman, we have lost over the years, and I am talking about 20 years that has really had an impact on where we are with any of our resources today. In fact, I have testified before that we have lost about 8,000 non-fire positions over the last 20 years. A lot of those positions include a lot of these critical resource areas that we depend on to manage that landscape.

Range cons, range conservationist, a range specialist, is one of those resources that we have lost quite a bit of. And we know that we have a lot of rangeland, particularly across the West, but across the United States.

Dr. GOSAR. Now, I regularly hear from ranchers in my district that they are hearing that the agency says there is no money for key projects, despite nearly every other program area seeing significant increases in this budget. The fact that nearly half of the agency's portfolio are rangelands, how do you explain the lack of the parity for those 96 million acres of rangeland under the Forest Service management?

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, we are trying to show that rangelands are really critical, they are important. In fact, in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, we have a plus million-and-a-half bucks to go toward range management. So, we are trying to recognize that in the budgeting process.

Dr. GOSAR. Got you. According to the last report available, which was for the year 2020, the National Forest Service authorized a total of 871,152 animal unit months, also known as AUMs, in the state of Arizona. Only 2,330 AUMs were on private land.

I say this to illustrate the point that the Forest Service and the decisions that they make in terms of management play an outsized role in my district and the state at large in this industry. Since you have been Chief, have you had a chance to visit any of the permittees in Arizona?

Mr. MOORE. Well, when we made the announcement on the wild-fire crisis strategy, I met with some of the ranchers at that point.

Dr. GOSAR. There or here?

Mr. MOORE. In Arizona, where we made the announcement, we made the first announcement with the Secretary.

Dr. GOSAR. So, now we are also currently experiencing some ongoing issues in the state, including conflicts between different types of users, which I would love to work out with you. Can I get a commitment from you to come visit us in the near future?

Mr. MOORE. Sure. In fact, I am sorry I didn't have a chance to visit you before, but I have been there quite a bit. But I am willing to always come back and visit, particularly with a personal invitation by you.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, I will tell you, Arizona is very interesting.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Dr. GOSAR. And I think we could have solved a lot of our problems with our catastrophic wildfires if we would have just come through with the projects of the good stewardship aspect, and got contracts out at appropriate times. Do you see any of that moving forward?

Mr. MOORE. I am not sure I am familiar with the information that you are referring to, but I would be happy to follow up with you to look into what you are seeing as a concern to see how we might be able to address that.

Dr. GOSAR. Part of the problem around particularly Flagstaff is that you are working with a volcanic cone that is very steep. So, you ought to be taking care of what the mountain does first, but then go around.

But it would sure be nice to see you out there and have that conversation, because the tools that are being used are being mis-used. What the Forest Service on the ground are saying doesn't equate to the way the tool was meant to be utilized for these animal units. Thank you.

I yield.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. Next, I would like to recognize the gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Moore, thank you for being here. It is good to see you again. Thank you for your testimony.

And I know you touched on this, but for the sake of our dialogue, how is it going with the hiring of, first of all, for seasonal firefighters, how is that challenge going right now?

Mr. MOORE. That is an interesting question. Because on the one hand, I would say it is going very well. As a matter of fact, last year we hired about 3,400 new employees into the Forest Service.

The problem with that, though, is that we lost 2,600 people through attrition. So, we are trying to——

Mr. FULCHER. Now, is that a total number, or just——

Mr. MOORE. Total number.

Mr. FULCHER. OK, all right.

Mr. MOORE. Total numbers. And remember, before I have said that of the 8,000 that we lost, we want to replace 4,000 of them. And then we wanted to leverage the other positions through partnerships. So, we had moved out to hire about 3,400 last year, which we did. So, we do have 3,400 new employees into the agency, but we lost 2,600 during that same amount of time.

So, when you look at increasing capacity, we have only netted about 800 new positions into the agency.

Mr. FULCHER. So, how many openings? Since you are looking at the overall number, how many openings do you have right now? In a perfect world, if you could fill the——

Mr. MOORE. Well, our plan is to hire 2,500 this year, and we will be looking at probably even doing more of that, because we know that if we look at our annual attrition rate it is at about 1,800 per year. So, we know that we have to exceed the potential attrition rate if we are going to really look at increasing capacity. But we are moving to increase capacity. We are making a lot of good progress.

Now we need to look at what is preventing the retention concern that we have across the board. Part of it, and a large part of it, had to do with our firefighters that were leaving because of the issues that we had around pay, around housing, around physical and mental care. So, we are addressing that on a temporary basis, and we are seeing the results change to date just based on this temporary fix.

Now, we will see that continue to go down, the attrition continue to go down if this is made permanent.

Mr. FULCHER. You did mention partnerships.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. FULCHER. And the scenario with labor and the open positions, it looks like that would be an important component. With that, just shift gears a little bit. Talk about one of those partnerships that is prevalent in my state, Good Neighbor Authority. What is your view of that, and how is that going, from your vantage point?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, so the Good Neighbor Authority has been just a wonderful tool for us. In fact, when you look at how we are working with states, counties, tribes, it has really magnified what we are able to do. And it has really brought in a different type of collaboration that we are having with our partners.

The other thing that we are doing in terms of partnership, not necessarily through GNA, Good Neighbor Authority, but one pilot we have now is moving timber out of Northern California into Wyoming and South Dakota to really help support the wood industry infrastructure. We are doing some of those types of things, trying to maintain the existing infrastructure we have to keep any more mills from closing or shutting down.

And now, what we want to do is introduce the new technology or the new innovations into this process. So, we are working with

industry and others to kind of help us decide how we might want to do that.

Mr. FULCHER. And that makes sense. And as you are probably aware, we are attempting to expand that Good Neighbor Authority so that tribes and counties can participate in the revenue-sharing component, and that is not the case. So, is it fair to say that you support that?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. In fact, when I look at the difference between us and the states in the GNA, and when we look at tribes and counties, there is a big difference because of how you can or cannot spend the revenue.

I think if there was a change in the new farm bill that would allow that same way to operate with counties and tribes, you would see a much bigger use of GNA across the country. And I will say that GNA has really brought the community of people together looking at trying to address the issues we have on our landscapes.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you for that.

Mr. Chairman, just for the record, I want to point out that this GNA program has been good, and we have such a backlog of work that needs to be done. Obviously, there are shortages with staffing.

And just for the record, in 2022, there were 10 timber sale contracts that were awarded that were worth approximately \$3.4 million, and that also equated to 18.5 million board feet of timber that were processed through that program. And that is just one of the tools that I hope that we can expand and include tribes and counties in.

With that, I yield back.

Mrs. BOEBERT [presiding]. The gentleman's time is expired. The Chair recognizes Ranking Member Mr. Neguse.

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chief Moore, good to see you. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we are very grateful for the work that you are doing at the Forest Service and on a number of different policy areas that are deeply important to the people of Colorado and folks in my district.

I want to talk a bit about, first, some of the landscape work and the fuels reduction. I am very grateful for the investments that the Forest Service has made thus far as part of the agency's Priority Landscapes rollout last year. And as I mentioned, we were grateful to welcome you to Colorado in the Arapahoe Roosevelt National Forest for the \$33 million appropriation or allocation that the Forest Service had made with respect to that particular forest.

But I also represent, or my district, rather, includes many other national forests. As you know, Colorado is home to 12, and that includes the White River National Forest, which has not received any funding through the 10-year strategy and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, but faces grave threats from wildfires, including threats to critical watersheds and water supplies.

So, I guess what I would like to ask, Mr. Moore, is if you could just explain how the Forest Service intends to designate additional projects past the initial landscape investments that have been made, and what the criteria will be for those additional designations. And I just wonder how you are taking into account the combined watershed and water supply ecosystem and

recreation conditions within those different landscapes, which, ultimately, I think, would, in the case of the White River National Forest, certainly move it up the list with respect to the next phase, next tranche of landscape projects that you all announced, as well as the Routt National Forest and others in Colorado.

Mr. MOORE. Yes. So, let me say up front and let me recognize here that every place that doesn't currently have a landscape can justify that they should have one. And I think what it does is underscores the critical need to do a lot of work, particularly across the West, when you are talking about haz [hazardous] fuel reduction, when you talk about really trying to be responsive to the fires that we see all across the country because it has an impact on so many areas.

Colorado, for example, with the type of, what we call it, the material there in relation to soil, we know that erosion can occur quickly, and that erosion goes right into the bodies of water. We know that it is critically important. You also have a lot of really threatened and endangered species there, as well, that are really important. And you have communities like the White River area.

So, we are looking at combining not just the bill and IRA funding and the GAO funding, but also the regular appropriated dollars. And what we have done and what we are doing in a lot of our communities is building collaboratives, and those are community-led collaboratives, where we are sitting down with them to help decide what are those priorities in those different communities. And we are seeing a lot of payoff in terms of building partnerships and relationships into these communities that we serve that we don't typically have. And now that we have some dollars, we want to make sure that we are working with communities to help us prioritize where that work is at.

Now, I can't tell you that the White River doesn't deserve more. It does. It also underscores the importance of the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, because it does address a lot of those types of concerns. And I would just say, one, particularly in your district, since you asked the question, the White River has a pilot that we are looking at nationally, and it really gets at this housing issue for fire-fighters, but also all of our employees, because, like the White River, it is very expensive to live in many places there.

So, our employees, while we are serving those communities, we cannot afford to live in those communities. So, what we want to do is look at different types of ways that we can address this housing crisis that we have in many of our employees. The White River National Forest is looking at working with the county to look at a long-term lease to build housing that will be affordable housing for our employees and others, as well, in the community.

Mr. NEGUSE. And we are very excited. Thank you, Mr. Moore. Thank you, Chief Moore, very excited about that particular project. Of course, well aware, and working with Summit County and the folks there to make sure that that comes to fruition.

I am grateful to hear about the holistic way, I think, in which the Forest Service is going to approach the landscape identification process moving forward.

A lot of my colleagues may not know, who aren't from Colorado, that White River National Forest is the most visited national forest

in the United States of America, in my district. So, I am very grateful that you have recognized that.

I also would just have to, in my final one second, simply say we have to do more on firefighter pay. And I know we have made great strides on that front through changes that we made in the law that I championed with my colleagues. But I am looking forward to working with you to ensure that those pay increases are permanent. We cannot allow those to lapse.

With that, thank you for the indulgence and I yield back.

Mrs. BOEBERT. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair recognizes Mr. LaMalfa for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chief Moore, good to see you. Welcome here today. There was some talk earlier in this Committee because not all the Republicans supported a \$1.6 billion allocation for the Forest Service of a giant, over a trillion-dollar bill, which would be, I think, a tenth of a percent, if I am thinking correctly, that we are somehow not in favor of your mission and firefighting and forest management, which a lot of us are not going to support trillion-dollar bills to get a little bitty goodie in there, and whether it is in the infrastructure bill or the so-called inflation reduction bill. So, know that we are here to help, and do it through a good appropriation process, and give you the tools you need.

Let me jump over to the important aspect we are facing right now, and I have a series of questions, so I am going to ask you to be real, real concise. Do you agree that fire retardant is a critical tool, especially with the aircraft, and what we are using via aircraft, what we are facing in the West with giant wildfire?

Mr. MOORE. Do I—

Mr. LAMALFA. Do you agree that it is a critical tool?

Mr. MOORE. Oh, yes.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK, thank you. All right. So, I was pretty bummed out here recently in Committee that the Forest Service testified against my bipartisan legislation to protect the continued use of fire retardant from frivolous litigation that is seeking to ban its use. And if they are successful, it will take EPA up to 3 years to re-approve this material for fighting wildfire. Why would the Forest Service be against legislation to keep what we have?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I don't know that we are against the use of retardant. In fact, we think it is a critical and necessary way. Not only is it a safety issue for our firefighters, but it is also an issue for protecting communities.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, we agree on that. So, we had legislation to put a stop to a frivolous lawsuit trying to get rid of the material that will take 3 years to re-approve a permit to continue using the same stuff we have been using successfully. It has a record of only a tiny, tiny percent accidentally getting into a waterway, and it showed no ill effect. They do a great job of keeping it out of, there is a 300-foot buffer between the fire zone and the actual waterways. So, 99.9 percent of that doesn't even get beyond the 300-foot buffer. So, why would we not fight to keep this material, especially since we have wildfire every year and have that taken away from us for 3 years?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. You know, Congressman, you are right there. There is probably less than 1 percent of retardant that actually gets into streams. And we are really concerned that, if that is taken away from us, then it is going to create a real big problem for us.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, I mean, this helps make your life easier for the men and women on the line there. So, I think we have——

Mr. MOORE. I am consistent in what I am saying, though.

Mr. LAMALFA. What is that?

Mr. MOORE. I mean, the way I just approached that. I have said this all along, that use of retardant is critical for our needs.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you. All right. Well, then please find a way to support my bill, should it come to be really needed in the interim, because I don't know what we will do in the next 2 or 3 years without it.

Mr. McClintock and myself, we had sent a letter to you last year on the "let-burn policies" that you promised that we were going to implement aggressive strategies to extinguish wildfires within the first 24 hours after one is detected. Is that demonstrably different than previous years in utilizing that?

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, I know you have a lot of questions, but this takes a little bit of time to explain because I do think this is an area——

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, I mean, they only give me 5 minutes around here. So, do you think more or less that we have seen a measurable, positive success in stopping the let-burn?

[No response.]

Mr. LAMALFA. Measurable.

Mr. MOORE. Well, I guess where I am going is that the interpretation of let it burn differs between what the agency is saying and how some people in the communities are viewing that.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes. Do you think it has made a difference, though, in more aggressive, early attack?

Mr. MOORE. Do I think let it burn has made a difference?

Mr. LAMALFA. No, us asking for us to, whatever you want to call the let-burn.

Mr. MOORE. I am not sure I understand.

Mr. LAMALFA. Let me talk about Secure Rural Schools real quick. Under Title II and III of Secure Rural Schools, would you commit to returning to the original language intent of SRS Titles II and III, so that they have the flexibility locally to move the money as they see fit?

When they have lost that flexibility, they are kind of stuck with how they can use that money.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I understand the need to want to do that, but I am not sure that the Administration has taken a position on that yet, Congressman.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, they are telling me they have lost the ability under the Title II and III part of Secure Rural Schools to have the flexibility, so we need to return to having those Title II and III tools——

Mrs. BOEBERT. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Thank you. The Chair recognizes Mr. Stauber for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And Chief Moore, great to see you. Thanks for joining us today. I have a host of topics I would like to cover, so just please bear with me.

First off, I reintroduced the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act this year. Local support has been quickly and strongly building, and I understand that Chippewa National Forest staff has been enthusiastically engaging on the bill and the concurrent administrative exchange. As the bill moves through this body, can you please commit to working with us until it becomes law?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I would be happy to work with you, Congressman.

Mr. STAUBER. Great. Thank you very much. Now I would like to focus on recreational topics that have impacted the Superior National Forest in particular.

In January 2022, the U.S. Forest Service cut 13 percent of permits into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, justifying the cut in permits due to more folks enjoying the outdoors due to COVID.

Next, Wilderness Watch is again suing you over towboat usage, despite a 2015 settlement. For those that don't know the context, in brief, the 1978 Act allows for towboat usage so folks can have a recognized outfitter motor them to a different entry point, which limits crowding and makes the wilderness more accessible. The clear goal of this misguided, anti-use lawyer group is to end the ability of, in my opinion, anybody to enjoy the wilderness. It is clear that these groups don't like or don't appreciate our seniors who have a need and want and desire to be in the boundary waters or those with a disability to have access and to enjoy our public lands.

And third, Lutsen Mountains needs a special use permit to expand their ski resort. Otherwise, they won't be able to compete with the larger resorts in the West. The opposition is refusing to meet with them, and the ball is now in your and the Forest's court.

Mr. Moore, I appreciate our working relationship, and I expect it to continue, but please see these individual issues for what they are: in my opinion, a clear, targeted action that, at best, make access harder to the Superior National Forest or, at worst, end it altogether.

So, Chief Moore, on canoe permits, tow boats, or Lutsen, will you please commit to actions that will expand access to the Superior National Forest, and not limit it?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congressman. Let me say that I think having access to these public lands is really important, and so is managing access to these same public lands. And there is kind of a delicate balance where, no matter which way we go, we have a large share of our public just unhappy with whatever that decision is.

In terms of Lutsen Mountain, we are looking to finish up that EIS, the final EIS, and hoping to have a decision this summer.

Mr. STAUBER. Chief, this summer, can you give us an idea? Just a rough ballpark.

Mr. MOORE. I don't, because I wouldn't want you to hold me to something that I haven't had discussions with the local folks—

Mr. STAUBER. Remember, in jest, our summers are shorter in Minnesota.

Mr. MOORE. I know.

Mr. STAUBER. It is a time frame.

[Laughter.]

Mr. STAUBER. OK. If you are unable to fix any of these issues administratively, I expect your agency's assistance in legislation that will rectify these problems in statute.

And lastly, I do want to thank you for the Chippewa and Superior continuing to produce timber. However, our work is not done. Our counties manage a lot of checkerboard land. Will the Administration support counties retaining receipts from the good neighbor management?

Mr. MOORE. I believe we would. Because we think that that is a way to increase the amount of use for GNA, and not only for counties but for tribes, as well.

Mr. STAUBER. Right. And I think that putting forth a Good Neighbor Authority, good neighbor management, is important to also recognize the cost to the counties to do so. There has to be that reimbursement back, so they can cover their costs.

Chief Moore, I appreciate you being here today, and I look forward to continued conversations to protect the opportunity for us all to enjoy our national forests. Thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Thank you. The gentleman yields and the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it, and government is always trying to fix its last solution. And I would say that those two sentences for me epitomize the failures of the regulatory over-reach that we see quite often with the management of the national forests.

In 2001, the USDA U.S. Forest Service promulgated the roadless rule, which prohibited timber harvesting and road construction on 58.5 million acres of National Forest Service lands, or approximately one-third of the entirety of our national forests in the United States, including 3.2 million acres in the state of Wyoming. Despite the GAO report stating that such an action would limit the Forest Service from safely thinning dense forests or improving resistance to insects and diseases that otherwise kill trees, thereby adding to fuel loads, the agency moved forward with the rule.

I have the GAO report. It was issued in November 2000, and there was very important information included in there, including the fact that the Forest Service recognized at the time that, should the rule be adopted, it would prohibit the construction of roads, even if such a road would help the agency to restore and maintain desired ecological conditions.

The rule also would not authorize road construction or reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas to restore and maintain ecological sustainability. And national forests could generally not construct a road to thin stands of trees and mechanically remove underbrush and dead vegetation to reduce the risk of

uncontrollable and potentially catastrophic fire, or to improve the forest resistance to insects and disease that otherwise could kill trees and add to fuel loads.

There were numerous national forests throughout the country that were extremely concerned and opposed the roadless rule because they recognized what it would do. And, in fact, we now know what it has done, which it is responsible for the catastrophic forest fires we have seen, and it is also responsible for the pine beetle outbreak that we have suffered in the interior West.

According to this report, officials on several national forests included in our review voiced concerns about the long-term impacts of the roadless rule. For example, officials on the Routt National Forest anticipated an outbreak of beetles resulting from a catastrophic windstorm in 1997 that felled 13,000 acres of trees in or adjacent to roadless areas on the forest. They believed that the preferred alternative, the roadless rule, would not allow them to construct the roads necessary to remove trees in roadless areas that in the future may become infected by beetles currently living within this deadfall. And, in fact, Chief Moore, that is exactly what has happened, hasn't it?

Mr. MOORE. I think you very eloquently described some of the challenges that we have with the roadless rule.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes. The roadless rule failed us in terms of being able to manage our national forests. Wouldn't that be fair to say?

Mr. MOORE. Well, it has certainly presented some challenges to us, which we are realizing now.

Ms. HAGEMAN. But you knew back in 2000, not you, but the Forest Service was warned way back in 2000—and there were many people, including Forest Service personnel from all over the United States, who actually begged the National Forest Service, I have the letters, to please not adopt the roadless rule because it was going to result in exactly what has happened, which is catastrophic forest fire and pine beetle outbreak and devastation throughout the interior West. Correct?

Mr. MOORE. I am not sure what you have read, but I stand by the statement I made just now.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. What is your plan to increase access to roadless areas so that you can monitor, detect, and treat bark beetle infestations in the future?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I think that is part of anytime these bills have been passed, Congresswoman, is that we need to sit down—

Ms. HAGEMAN. That wasn't a bill, that was a regulation.

Mr. MOORE. Well, any time even that regulations are there, we need to sit down and really look at the implications of that regulation.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So, in fact, you haven't been doing that in your position as forest chief up to this point, recognizing, to use your terminology, that the roadless rule created very serious challenges for the National Forest Service?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I am recognizing that we do have challenges with the roadless rule.

And no, I have not, because I have only been in the job for a little while, and that has not been my focus.

Ms. HAGEMAN. OK. Even though it affects one-third of our national forests.

Mr. MOORE. We have gone on record saying that our forests need to be managed, the vegetation needs to be removed because it contributes to disease and insect outbreak, as well as wildfires.

Ms. HAGEMAN. On a related note, yes or no, is it a priority for you to ensure that Western states that are vulnerable to extreme wildfires have streamlined tools to increase the pace of wildfire risk protection?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, all forests.

Ms. HAGEMAN. And is Wyoming a Western state?

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. The Wyoming delegation sent you a letter on March 15, 2023, asking as to why we were excluded from the management commission and the 10-year strategy that you have put together. Will you add Wyoming to the Wildland Fire Mitigation Management Commission and 10-year strategy?

Mr. MOORE. We are always looking for ways to improve what we are doing, Congresswoman, but let me, if I could, just address Wyoming. Even though Wyoming does not have one of the 21 priority landscapes yet, we are putting \$10 million in this year's budget toward Wyoming, trying to protect some of those areas.

Ms. HAGEMAN. \$10 million for 9.2 million acres of land?

Mrs. BOEBERT. The gentlewoman's time has expired. The gentleman may answer the question.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, but keep in mind we are doing other treatments in Wyoming, as well. I had mentioned one of the pilot projects we have, where we are taking timber out of California and moving it into Hulett, Wyoming to help really stabilize the wood industry. So, that is having a positive impact not only in Wyoming, but also South Dakota, as well, on the Black Hills.

So, we are recognizing the need to do a lot more than what we are currently doing all across the West—

Ms. HAGEMAN. But that isn't treating our national forests.

Mrs. BOEBERT. The gentlewoman's time has expired.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I would ask that you respond to our letter in writing, please.

Mr. MOORE. Sure, yes.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Thank you. And as the Chair, I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I want to thank you so much, Chief Moore, for being here.

The Forest Service estimates 63 million acres are currently at risk of catastrophic wildfire, and each year nearly 10 million acres in the United States catch on fire. Instead of engaging in active management to reduce the size and number of wildfires, this Administration chose to spend billions on the back end, putting out wildfires.

From 2015 to 2020, \$14.1 billion of taxpayer money was spent just extinguishing fires. This is the result of poor forest management, frivolous lawsuits filed by radical environmentalists, unnecessary red tape from the Federal bureaucracy, and policies that prioritize funding for suppression as opposed to active management. The last 2 years under Democrat control have left my district on fire, literally.

Chief Moore, as you know, wildfires continue to deliver historic devastations to our Western states. In my home state of Colorado, four of the five worst wildfires in state history have all occurred since 2018, and the problem is only getting worse. Colorado is ranked third worst in the country for properties at high extreme risk of wildfire damage. The need for more active forest management in Colorado could not be more apparent.

Despite the clear need, last year the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region saw a decrease of nearly 20 percent in timber output from the previous year's amount. Chief Moore, what is being done to ensure that the level of timber output and active forest management actually increases in Colorado and the Rocky Mountain Region?

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Congresswoman. Let me start by saying that the forests have not been poorly managed. I think there has been a lack of management taking place, and a lot of that—

Mrs. BOEBERT. I could agree with that.

Mr. MOORE [continuing]. Is due directly to the resources that we have not been able to get until recently. So, what you see us trying to do now is build the infrastructure so that we can be more effective in how much we are able to provide by treating the landscape.

And this past year, between BIL and IRA funding, we have tried to build a foundation of the structure to be more successful in some of the outputs that we are looking at. We are looking at hiring more people. We have looked at creating more collaboratives to work with the communities. And now that we have done a lot of that, now it is really about hitting the ground.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. This year you will see us hitting the ground, and you will see much more coming out in terms of productivity.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Thank you, Chief Moore. I would agree that there is a lack of forest management, but that also includes not just infrastructure, but just the red tape from the Federal bureaucracy, the frivolous lawsuits that have taken place, the designations that prevent us from managing our forests.

Chief Moore, diminishing timber sales allotted by the Forest Service have led to mill closures across the country in recent years, including in my district. There are legitimate infrastructure concerns throughout the West as sawmills that need reliable Federal timber continue to shutter as the Forest Service fails to deliver. What is the Forest Service's plan to turn around the trend of mill closures in the West?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I just mentioned earlier to the Congresswoman from Wyoming on what we are trying to do with the industry to try to maintain the existing infrastructure and yet, at the same time, introducing new opportunities through cross-laminated timber, also biochar opportunities, which creates jobs.

The other part of the bill that is allowing us to support the existing infrastructure is to look at mill modifications, modernizing. We have spent quite a few dollars on some of the facilities, modernizing them to use the type of material, basically, low-value, small-diameter-type material.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Thank you. And since our time is short, what is the Forest Service's plan to process hazardous fuels necessary to meet your wildfire strategy goals without more mill infrastructure?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, and it goes back to my earlier statement. We do not have the infrastructure in place, looking at the traditional infrastructure, and that is why we are looking at wood innovations to bring in new ways to utilize this material that we really have. Colorado would be one of those states that has this type of material, because, as you know, you have lost the infrastructure there, by and large.

Mrs. BOEBERT. Right. Thank you, Chief Moore.

I think it is clear House Republicans have real solutions to prevent catastrophic wildfires and protect our local communities and improve the health of our nation's forests, all while saving taxpayer money. This budget fails to accomplish any of these goals.

And I yield back, and Chief Moore, I want to thank you so much for your valuable testimony, and the Members for their questions. Thank you so much for your time for being here with us. I know you are headed to Colorado. If I am in the area, I would love to meet up with you there, as well. But, hopefully, we can have representation if I am not. So, thank you for going in person to Colorado for those meetings with our foresters.

Members of the Committee may have some additional questions for our witness today, and we will ask that he respond to these in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Monday, May 1, 2023. The hearing record will be open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:03 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

