



Date: 5/18/2023

Re: “Examining the Challenges Facing Forest Management, Wildfire Suppression and Wildland Firefighters Ahead of the 2023 Wildfire Year”

Chairman Tiffany, Vice Chair John Curtis, and members of the Natural Resources Sub-Committee on Federal Lands. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the May 16 hearing “Examining the Challenges Facing Forest Management, Wildfire Suppression and Wildland Firefighters Ahead of the 2023 Wildfire Year”.

The National Wildfire Suppression Association represents over 348 member companies across twenty-nine states that provide resources to the agencies under a variety of contracts and agreements for wildfire suppression response. Our resources are the “boots on the ground” and the scope of resources available from our industry is substantial. We make up over forty-five percent (45%) of all resources on the ground on fires, and up to ninety percent (90%) of all “iron (heavy equipment)”. Our agreements are of excellent value to the agency and the taxpayer as we “call when needed” resources to supplement the agency contingency when there is need. We have been providing resources to the agencies for over 30 years, and many times we still see no recognition of what we bring to the table in their efforts against these catastrophic wildfires.

Currently the agency uses a variety of agreements Incident Blanket Procurement Agreements (IBPA), Emergency Equipment Rental Agreements and Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire these types of resources. As of 2022 there are over 419 Type 2 Hand Crews, 37 Types 2 Initial Attack Hand Crews and over 14,000 pieces of equipment including water handling, heavy equipment, camp support as well many other types of specialized resources.

Sustain the Workforce:

In all areas of industry, we are struggling to sustain our workforce, and in an industry such as emergency response with no guarantee of work that is a challenge we face. They involve long days, periods of time away from family, and few creature comforts on the job.

We have seen the agency in some rural locations having to stand down equipment due to lack of staffing, and even in areas where large signing bonuses are offered (sometimes up to \$25,000 signing bonuses for an engine boss) they are still unable to fill those positions. Due to the limitation of bid ranges and the nature of “call when needed” work we cannot offer those kinds of incentives in private industry.

Fuels Mitigation/Prescribed Burning

We believe in the philosophy of all hands, all lands and the Professional Private industry and we are proud to be a partner with the agencies in these efforts. We also have a long history of expertise in wildland fire, fire rehab, prescribed burning, and fuels mitigation.

We have worked with Chief Moore and Ms. Hall-Rivera about the opportunity to increase the capacity of the public/private partnership utilizing the current contract vehicles in place for these fire resources.

They have the equipment, qualifications, and expertise to immediately help address the substantial backlog of work which urgently needs to be addressed, and we look forward to continuing that collaboration.

Our industry also has some newer technology that currently the agency does not contract for that could boost productivity if it were utilized for fuels treatment. Things such as whole tree chippers, track mulchers, and more that our companies have invested in for work they do with the states and with private landowners but currently there are avenues to provide those to the federal agencies.

We are concerned about whether the Emergency Declaration being utilized fully; in some cases, we have seen a slow response in making the funding available, which is causing missed opportunities to get work done.

In Summary:

Private industry has, will and can continue to play a significant role in providing much needed resources including heavy equipment, water handling, hand crews and other specialized equipment. We also have the qualifications and expertise to assist with large landscape fuel projects to help address those backlogs and reduce wildfire risk on the landscape. The agency would need to look at some changes to the current contract vehicles to allow us to have a wider scope of work in some cases, but the workforce is there and the equipment also. These companies have invested substantial amounts of dollars in the companies to be able to provide these resources, and we just want to be sure that the companies with the “best value” to the agency and taxpayer get the opportunity to provide those resources.

We are happy to answer any questions or provide more information to the committee upon request.

Thank you for the opportunity.

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