

**H.R. 528, H.R. 655, H.R. 1276,
AND H.R. 2876**

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: Subcommittee on Federal Lands Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Federal Lands; Aniela Butler and Jason Blore—
Aniela@mail.house.gov and Jason.Blore@mail.house.gov; x6-7736
Date: April 28, 2025
Subject: Legislative Hearing on 4 Bills

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold a legislative hearing on 4 bills:

- H.R. 528 (Rep. Pettersen), “*Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025*”;
- H.R. 655 (Rep. Bentz), “*The Dalles Watershed Development Act*”;
- H.R. 1276 (Rep. Comer), To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky; and
- H.R. 2876 (Rep. Moore of UT), “*University of Utah Research Park Act*”.

The hearing will take place on **Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.** in room 1334 Longworth House Office Building.

Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez (Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, April 28, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- The legislation featured in this hearing offers commonsense solutions to right-size the federal estate by transferring land to local governments and removing burdensome deed restrictions that stifle development.
- Together, these bills also improve land management by empowering local officials to ensure greater water resiliency for their community, enhancing the growth opportunities of a beloved charity, and facilitating cutting-edge research and innovation.
- This hearing also includes legislation that will promote vital forest management and reforestation initiatives, which recently passed the House of Representatives as a component of the bipartisan H.R. 471, the “*Fix Our Forests Act*.”

II. WITNESSES

PANEL I: (Members of Congress):

- *To Be Announced*

PANEL II:

- **Ms. Ellen Shultzabarger**, Associate Deputy Chief—National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, D.C. [*H.R. 528 and H.R. 655*]

PANEL III:

- **The Honorable Richard Mays**, Mayor, The Dalles, Oregon [*H.R. 655*]

- **The Honorable George P. Bray**, Mayor, Paducah, Kentucky [H.R. 1276]
- **Mr. Taylor R. Randall**, President, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah [H.R. 2876]
- **Mr. Matthew M. McCombs**, State Forester and Director, Colorado State Forest Service, Fort Collins, Colorado [H.R. 528] [Minority Witness]

III. BACKGROUND

H.R. 528 (Rep. Pettersen), “*Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025*”



A USFS and Montana Department of Natural Resources post-burn restoration project.
Source: Nicky Ouellet, Montana Public Radio, 2018.

There is an urgent need to restore landscapes damaged by wildfire and other natural disasters. Since 2000, the United States has lost an average of 7 million acres per year to catastrophic wildfires, more than double the annual average lost during the 1990s.¹ Worse still, many of these catastrophic wildfires burn so severely that natural regeneration of the forest becomes impossible.² If these lands are not artificially regenerated (i.e., by planting trees), they will eventually transition from forests to shrublands.³ In 2022, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) identified a 4-million-acre federal reforestation backlog, 80 percent of which is attributable to catastrophic wildfires.⁴ Yet, over the preceding decade, USFS only addressed less than 6 percent of its post-wildfire planting needs annually.⁵ Clearly, more needs to be done to tackle the reforestation backlog.⁶

In addition to wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters have also inflicted extensive damage on many of our nation’s forests, resulting in an enormous loss of trees. In 2024, for example, Hurricane Helene ripped through the southeastern U.S., causing widespread devastation and flooding. Roughly a fifth of the region’s federal forest land was severely damaged in the storm.⁷ According to the USFS, the destruction from that single hurricane extended for more than 200 miles through the southern Appalachians.⁸ Many of these areas remain in desperate need of reforestation and restoration work.

H.R. 528 is a bipartisan bill, led by Representatives Pettersen (D-CO-07) and Edwards (R-NC-11), that would require federal land management agencies to carry out priority reforestation projects using cooperative agreements and contracts with non-federal partners. Specifically, the legislation would require the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USFS, in coordination with states, Tribes, and local governments, to identify lands in critical need of rehabilitation post-natural disaster. The bill allows federal land managers to support projects through grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements. A similar proposal is included in the “*Fix Our Forests Act*,” which passed the House of Representatives earlier this year in a strong, bipartisan vote.⁹

H.R. 655 (Rep. Bentz), “The Dalles Watershed Development Act”

Settled on the banks of the Columbia River, The Dalles is the largest city in northcentral Oregon’s Wasco County.¹⁰ The city’s residents rely on water stored in the nearby Crow Creek Reservoir, which is located in the Mt. Hood National Forest and sourced by South Fork Mill Creek.¹¹ This single reservoir provides 80 percent of the city’s annual water supply for domestic and commercial use.¹² While the city owns much of the land occupied by the current reservoir, its dam, and the surrounding watershed, some sections extend onto adjacent USFS-managed land.¹³ The Dalles must apply for and receive a special use permit to access and maintain those portions of the municipal watershed that fall under the USFS’s jurisdiction.¹⁴ However, the USFS’s special use permit imposes considerable administrative burdens and limits future operations, repairs, and expansions of the reservoir and its associated dam.

With its population expected to increase over the coming decades, The Dalles should expect a concomitant rise in its long-term water-resource needs.¹⁵ This means that the city must secure improved access to its watershed. Accordingly, city officials have discussed plans to increase the Crow Creek Reservoir’s current capacity from 900 to 3,000 acre-feet.¹⁶ H.R. 655, introduced by Congressman Bentz (R-OR-02), provides a long-term solution to this problem by transferring approximately 150 acres of National Forest System lands that encompass the reservoir and its adjacent lands to city ownership. The conveyance of this parcel from the USFS to local hands would cut red tape by removing the recurring cost and administrative burden of abiding by the current special use permit. In fact, the City Manager of The Dalles estimated this bill would save the city at least \$150,000 in costs.¹⁷ Together, the provisions in this legislation would improve the efficiency of the Crow Creek Dam’s current operation, support the growing city’s water-management efforts, and reduce the federal estate.

H.R. 1276 (Rep. Comer), To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky.

Paducah Boys and Girls Club in Paducah, Kentucky.

Source: WPSD News, 2024.

For more than six decades, the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah (Club) has provided a safe and affordable environment in which the children of McCracken County can recreate and receive valuable mentorship.¹⁸ The Club’s namesake, Oscar Cross, was a probation officer who sought to provide young people with a valuable education outside of a classroom setting.¹⁹ After seeing rapid growth in his original organization, Cross rebranded and received official affiliation with the Boys and Girls Club of America in 1953.²⁰ The federal government conveyed the Club’s current site to the City of Paducah (City) through the National Park Service’s (NPS’s) Federal Lands to Parks Program, which allows communities to acquire surplus federal properties for parks and recreation.²¹ Under this program, nearly 184,000 acres of land have been transferred to state and local governments.²²

After decades of serving the community, the Club is pursuing a large-scale renovation to better serve its members, including the addition of new classrooms and a refurbished gym. The NPS still holds a deed restriction on the 3.62-acre parcel of land, preventing full ownership by the City and standing in the way of further development and improvements to the property.²³ For the renovation to occur, ownership of the parcel must be transferred from the City of Paducah to the Club, which can only be resolved by removing the remaining restriction that the NPS holds on the City's ownership.²⁴ H.R. 1276, led by Representative Comer (R-KY-01), would remove the NPS deed restriction on the parcel, giving the City full ownership of the property and the ability to promptly transfer the land to the Club. Crafted in collaboration with local stakeholders, H.R. 1276 would eliminate an unnecessary federal barrier to the Club's continued community investment and encourage new recreational and educational opportunities. Senator Paul (R-KY) is leading companion legislation in the Senate.²⁵

H.R. 2876 (Rep. Moore of UT), “University of Utah Research Park Act”

H.R. 2876 would release the federal government's reversionary interest in approximately 593 acres of non-federal land owned by the University of Utah. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) originally issued a patent for this land under the “Recreation and Public Purposes Act” to the University of Utah on October 18, 1968.²⁶ The patent specified that the land, located in Salt Lake City, could be used only for academic expansion, an arboretum, and a highway to access facilities used for those purposes.²⁷ Failing to adhere to the terms of the patent would trigger the reversionary interest, transferring the land back to the BLM.

In the intervening decades, the University of Utah developed the land, now known as Research Park, into a research and development center that serves both the university and the local workforce.²⁸ Research Park has helped over 100 start-ups, conceived mostly by University of Utah students and researchers.²⁹ The park currently hosts approximately 50 companies, 81 university departments, and a workforce of more than 14,000 people.³⁰ Among these are innovative companies specializing in biotechnology, pharmaceutical development, and manufacturing, all of which provide opportunities for students to learn and work among experts.³¹ This parcel has been used in this fashion by the University since the issuance of the patent and BLM has not been involved in the management of the land for more than 55 years. A recent review of Research Park uncovered that the parcel was not in compliance with the patent because of the commercial nature of the companies currently located there. Unfortunately, the restrictive terms of the reversionary clause mean that the University cannot continue to host these companies, despite the considerable educational and economic benefits they provide to students and the broader community.³²

Sponsored by Representative Moore (R-UT-01), H.R. 2876 would authorize the release of the reversionary interest in the land to the University of Utah, allowing for the activities at Research Park to continue. This bill would also enable the university to move forward with its plans to enhance the area further by making it more walkable, creating additional residential facilities, and bringing in additional laboratories and offices.³³ Senator Lee (R-UT) is the sponsor of the companion legislation in the Senate.³⁴

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & SECTION-BY-SECTION

H.R. 528 (Rep. Pettersen), “Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025”

Section 2. Post Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Program

- Requires the Secretary of the Interior to identify lands that require reforestation and restoration due to unplanned disturbances and that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance.
- Requires the Secretary to propose a list of priority projects for reforestation and restoration to be completed each fiscal year and carry out those projects through grants or cooperative agreements.
- Directs the Secretary to consult or coordinate with State and local governments, Tribes, institutions of higher education, and other land management agencies with adjacent land.
- Requires the Secretary to report, no later than two years after the bill's enactment and annually thereafter, to Congress on all land requiring reforestation and the progress made on priority restoration projects.

H.R. 655 (Rep. Bentz), “The Dalles Watershed Development Act”

Section 3. The Dalles Conveyance.

- Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to convey a 150-acre parcel of National Forest System land in the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles, Oregon, should the city submit a written request for conveyance within one year of enactment of the law. The conveyance will be made subject to valid existing rights and without consideration.
- Stipulates terms and conditions of the conveyance, including the map and legal description of the land, surveys, and administrative costs.

H.R. 1276 (Rep. Comer), To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky.

Section 1. Removal of Restriction.

- Directs the Secretary of the Interior to remove all deed restrictions from a 3.62-acre parcel of land conveyed to the City of Paducah, Kentucky, by the NPS on April 7, 2012.

H.R. 2876 (Rep. Moore of UT), “University of Utah Research Park Act”

Section 2. Confirmation of use of certain non-federal land in Salt Lake City, Utah, for valid public purposes.

- Clarifies that the University of Utah’s current use of approximately 593 acres of land, subject to a reversionary interest, as a research park is a valid public purpose consistent with the requirements of the “Recreation and Public Purposes Act.”³⁵
- Confirms that any other uses of the land in question that are consistent with its use as a research park or related university purpose, including student housing or transit hub development, are also valid public purposes consistent with the requirements of the “Recreation and Public Purposes Act.”

V. COST

During the 117th Congress, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the Senate companion legislation of the “University of Utah Research Park Act” would not affect direct spending or revenues.³⁶ None of the other bills included in the hearing have received a formal cost estimate from CBO.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POSITION

The administration’s position is unknown at this time.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW (RAMSEYER)

None of the bills featured in this hearing would change existing law.

- ¹ Anne A. Riddle, "Wildfire Statistics", Congressional Research Service, June 1, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/1F10244?source=search&guid=b824d954677449b918a65ece823396f&index=0>.
- ² Associated Press, "Wildfires have decimated forests. Here's why replanting trees is a challenge," October 2, 2024, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91200307/wildfires-forests-replanting-trees-restoration-challenges>.
- ³ *Id.*
- ⁴ U.S. Forest Service, "National Forest System: Reforestation Strategy: Growing and Nurturing Resilient Forests," July 2022, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reforestation-strategy.pdf>.
- ⁵ *Id.*
- ⁶ U.S. Forest Service, "American Forests Partners with USDA Forest Service to Expand Reforestation across National Forests", December 6, 2023, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/12/06/american-forests-partners-usda-forest-service-expand-reforestation>.
- ⁷ Simon Ducoquet, et al., "Where the trees once stood: See how Hurricane Helene wiped out North Carolina's forests", The Washington Post, November 9, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2024/hurricane-helene-forest-damage-north-carolina/>.
- ⁸ *Id.*
- ⁹ H.R. 471, 119th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/471>.
- ¹⁰ Susan Buce, "The Dalles," The Oregon Encyclopedia, April 5, 2024, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/the_dalles/.
- ¹¹ Wasco County Watersheds, "The Dalles Watershed," accessed March 24, 2025, <https://www.wascowatersheds.org/the-dalles>.
- ¹² Congressman Bentz Introduces Legislation to Improve the City of The Dalles, January 30, 2025, <https://bentz.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-bentz-introduces-legislation-improve-city-dalles-water-security>.
- ¹³ Per the map entitled, "The Dalles Conveyance Parcel A" and dated November 4, 2024. This map is on file with the Committee.
- ¹⁴ Tom Peterson, "TD watershed needs an Act of Congress in move against climate change," CCC News, January 25, 2025, <https://columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles-td-watershed-needs-an-act-of-congress-in-move-against-climate-change>.
- ¹⁵ Cole Goodwin, "Population Growth in The Dalles is Slowing But More Housing is Still Needed," CCC News, December 14, 2023, <https://columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles-population-growth-in-the-dalles-is-slowing-but-more-housing-is-still-needed>.
- ¹⁶ Tom Peterson, "TD watershed needs an Act of Congress in move against climate change," CCC News, January 25, 2025, <https://columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles-td-watershed-needs-an-act-of-congress-in-move-against-climate-change>.
- ¹⁷ *Id.*
- ¹⁸ Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah, "About Us", accessed April 21, 2025, <https://www.cebgb.club/about-us/>.
- ¹⁹ *Id.*
- ²⁰ *Id.*
- ²¹ The Office of Congressman James Comer, "Comer Introduces Legislation to Remove Federal Government Restrictions on Paducah, Kentucky, Property," February 13, 2025, <https://comer.house.gov/2025/2/comer-introduces-legislation-to-remove-federal-government-restrictions-on-paducah-kentucky-property>. National Park Service, Federal Lands to Parks Program, "Creating Local Parks and Recreation Since 1949", <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1508/index.htm>.
- ²² *Id.*
- ²³ Jeremiah Hatcher, "Comer talks Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club land transfer Bill", The Paducah Sun, February 25, 2025, https://www.paducahsun.com/news/comer-talks-oscar-cross-boys-girls-club-land-transfer-bill/article_99479980-5501-58bd-80bc-a4053c84c38e.html.
- ²⁴ *Id.*
- ²⁵ S. 601, 119th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/601/text/s-1&r=8>.
- ²⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, "Recreation and public Purposes Land Patent to the University of Utah" October 18, 1968, <https://d182hgwm88pjd.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2020/08/05141720/1968-10th-US-Grant-Land-Patent.pdf>.
- ²⁷ *Id.*
- ²⁸ The Office of Senator Mike Lee, "University of Utah Research Park Act," November 2, 2021, https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/2021.11.3_Research_Park_continuation.pdf.
- ²⁹ *Id.*
- ³⁰ Brian Maffly, "U. has big plans for Research Park, but land patent is getting in the way," The Salt Lake Tribune, December 15, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2021/12/15/u-has-big-plans-research/>.
- ³¹ The Office of Sen. Mike Lee, "University of Utah Research Park Act," Staff, November 2, 2021, https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/2021.11.3_Research_Park_continuation.pdf.
- ³² *Id.*
- ³³ Tony Semerad, "University of Utah plans major revamp of research park on Foothill Drive, adding lots of housing," The Salt Lake Tribune, June 9, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2020/06/09/dense-walkable-amenity/>.
- ³⁴ S. 1453; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/1453>.
- ³⁵ 43 U.S.C. 869 et seq.
- ³⁶ Congressional Budget Office, "Legislation Ordered Reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: Estimated Budgetary Effects and Mandates Information," November 21, 2022, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-11/s3370table_SenENR.pdf.

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 528, POST-DISASTER REFORESTATION AND RESTORATION ACT OF 2025; H.R. 655, THE DALLES WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT ACT; H.R. 1276, TO REMOVE RESTRICTIONS FROM A PARCEL OF LAND IN PADUCAH, KENTUCKY; AND H.R. 2876, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH RESEARCH PARK ACT

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

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

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:33 a.m. in Room 1334, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Tiffany, Stauber, Bentz, Maloy, Kennedy; Neguse, Stansbury, and Huffman.

Also present: Representative Comer.

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 consider four bills: H.R. 528, sponsored by Representative Pettersen, Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025; H.R. 655, sponsored by Representative Bentz, The Dalles Watershed Development Act; H.R. 1276, sponsored by Representative Comer, to remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky; and H.R. 2876, sponsored by Representative Moore of Utah, the University of Utah Research Park Act.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to participate in today's hearing from the dais: the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Comer and the gentleman from Utah, Mr. Moore. 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 now recognize myself for an opening statement.

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

Mr. TIFFANY. With the bills on today's agenda, this Subcommittee continues its efforts to re-balance the Federal estate, empower local communities, and address the needs and concerns of those who live closest to our public lands. The Federal Government owns roughly 640 million acres, or about 20 percent—or, excuse me, 28 percent—of the Nation's land mass. Too often this successive ownership serves as the main obstacle to effective and accountable land management. The bills under consideration today respond to instances in which Federal intrusiveness threatens to stifle business research and student education, limit the expansion of charitable activity, and jeopardize water resource security.

The seriousness of these consequences is why Committee Republicans continue to emphasize local empowerment as the touchstone of responsible land and natural resources policy. It is no exaggeration to say that such policy-making often plays a decisive role in shaping the destinies of many American communities. The four bills before us today reflect this understanding. Three of them would responsibly reduce the Federal estate, whether through transferring ownership or eliminating outdated restrictions. The fourth piece of legislation responds to the growing crisis of wildfire and natural disasters by prioritizing collaboration with non-Federal partners on reforestation and restoration efforts.

Let's begin with Representative Bentz's bill, H.R. 655. This legislation authorizes a modest land transfer of 150 acres from the Forest Service to the City of The Dalles, Oregon. For years Federal bureaucracy has hindered the city's efforts to expand a key water reservoir to serve its growing population. This bill removes that obstacle and ensures local water security while reducing the Federal estate in an area where continued ownership no longer makes sense.

Next, Representative Moore's bill, the University of Utah Research Park Act, releases the Bureau of Land Management's reversionary interest on nearly 600 acres of land conveyed to the University of Utah in 1968. Today Research Park, as the area is now called, is a thriving center of innovation that is home to more than 50 companies, 81 university departments, and workforce of over 14,000 people. The Federal Government's outdated patent restriction serves no practical purpose and only hinders desired growth. In fact, the patent is currently calling into question the university's right to use the land at all, thereby threatening the considerable education and economic benefits it has long provided to students in the broader Salt Lake City community. This bill removes that uncertainty and puts the University of Utah fully in charge of the land it has occupied for over half a century.

Legislation offered by Representative Comer, the Paducah Land Transfer Act, addresses a similar problem. The Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club has served the youth of Paducah for over 60 years. Although the club operates on city-owned land, the National Park Service holds an outdated deed restriction on the property. This restriction is blocking planned renovations to expand and modernize the club's services. To fix this problem, ownership of the parcel must be transferred from the City of Paducah to the club, which

can only be resolved by removing the deed restriction that the Park Service holds on the city's ownership. This bill cuts through that red tape and supports a beloved institution that has proved [sic] vital services to the city's youth.

Finally, we will consider the bipartisan Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025. This bill, which is being led by Representatives Petterson of Colorado and Edwards of North Carolina, directs the Forest Service and Department of the Interior to use cooperative agreements and contracts to implement vital reforestation projects on Federal land. From the storm-damaged forests of the southern Appalachians to the fire-scarred hills above Los Angeles, millions of acres of Federal land are in urgent need of restoration. This bill enlists the aid of States, Tribes, and local governments to address this growing backlog. Similar provisions are also included in the broader Fix Our Forests Act, which passed the House on an overwhelming bipartisan basis earlier this year and is now being considered in the Senate.

Though somewhat diverse, each of these legislative proposals shares a common theme: empowering communities to meet their own needs and steward their own resources without unnecessary interference from Washington. The legislation before us today will improve land management, strengthen water security, support youth development, and foster innovation. I could go on at length about each of the problems these bills address, but fortunately we have a distinguished panel of witnesses here who are eager to share their expertise.

In closing, I want to thank all of our witnesses for making the trip to be with us today. Your insights are highly valued by every member of the Subcommittee.

With that, I now recognize Ranking Member Neguse for an opening statement.

VOICE. Mr. Huffman.

Mr. TIFFANY. And would the Ranking Member of the Full Committee like to be recognized for 5 minutes?

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. For an opening statement.

Mr. HUFFMAN. I will go out of order, yes, thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. You are recognized.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. HUFFMAN. Well, thank you and good morning, Mr. Chairman. We have a handful of pretty straightforward, unremarkable bills this morning. Someone tuning in to this Subcommittee might think it is business as usual. Everything is normal and just fine. But it is not.

There is nothing normal about what is going on in Washington right now. Today marks the Trump administration's first 100 days. And in that time we have witnessed a deliberate assault on our public lands, something that this public lands Subcommittee should be talking about on a day like this. By fast-tracking fossil fuel projects through emergency provisions, fake emergency provisions, using NEPA, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, this Administration has cleared the way for projects with

significant environmental impacts, bypassing critical reviews and public input.

Our national parks, sacred spaces where we learn our truest, most inclusive American stories, are under siege. There is no other way to describe it. We don't talk about it here in this Committee or this Subcommittee, but it is happening and it is not normal. And this siege is not from wildfire or drought. It is from a calculated, orchestrated dismantling by the Trump administration and its unelected architect, Elon Musk.

In just 2 months, over 1,000 National Park Service employees have been laid off, hiring is frozen, leases for visitor centers and law enforcement offices have been canceled, facilities are closing, ranger-led programs are suspended, safety risks arising. And at the same time, visitation reached a record \$331 million people last year, highlighting the growing demand for these spaces.

The assault doesn't stop there. On March 1 President Trump signed executive—well, I am not going to call it executive order, that gives it too much credit. He signed imperial edict 14225, mandating the rapid expansion of timber production on Federal lands. This order directs agencies to expedite logging operations, circumventing environmental safeguards under ESA and NEPA. These moves, justified as a response to wildfire risks and declining forest health, should be criticized by everyone in this room, given their catalytic nature to speed up ecologic damage and species loss.

This is not a policy, it is a plunder. It is a calculated effort to strip our public lands of their integrity, to commodify our natural heritage for short-term gain, and it is happening under the guise of efficiency and economic necessity, and under invocations of fake emergencies.

In these past 2 months Republicans on this Committee have stood by in complacency. If my Committee's—if my Committee colleagues were serious about protecting our public lands, we would focus on restoring funding, reversing staffing cuts, ensuring robust environmental reviews, or at least providing some modicum of oversight while this wrecking ball tears its way through our Federal land agencies and our public lands themselves.

Honestly, this hearing is a missed opportunity, Mr. Chairman. Instead of providing real oversight of this Administration's public lands agenda, the Committee spending time on Republican bills almost entirely that give away public land and a Democratic bill that has already passed the House, in this time of chaos and uncertainty we should be working to reclaim our parks, to restore our stewardship, and demand accountability.

And I would be remiss if I didn't also say—to remind America that Congress is the Article I branch with legislative power, not Elon Musk, not Donald Trump.

I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Ranking Member yields. We will now move on to our first panel, which consists of members who are sponsoring today's legislation.

First I am going to recognize the gentleman from Oregon, Mr. Bentz, for 5 minutes on H.R. 655.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. CLIFF BENTZ, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON**

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee. And thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity you have provided to present my bill, H.R. 655, The Dalles Watershed Development Act.

The Dalles, Oregon, a city of some 16,000 people, depends on its municipal watershed for 80 percent of its drinking water. Protecting and managing this watershed is vital to the health, safety, and future of this community. Today that task is complicated by the fact that critical infrastructure, including the Crow Creek Dam and its reservoir, is located on both city-owned and federally managed Forest Service lands. The city currently operates these facilities under a special use permit, which is inefficient, costly, and adds an unnecessary layer of process to achieve something we all agree is necessary, and that is the city's ability to expand and modernize its water supply to meet growing demand.

The City of Dalles population has grown 11 percent since 2010, and is recognized as an affordable housing community in the mid-Columbia region. As with most Western cities, water demand is rising. And without action, the city's current reservoir capacity will fall short, leaving the city without enough water to meet its projected needs.

My bill, The Dalles Watershed Development Act, offers a practical, responsible simple solution: transferring 150 acres of Forest Service land within the municipal watershed into city ownership. This transfer will allow The Dalles to efficiently upgrade the Crow Creek Dam, expanding reservoir capacity by some 2,100 acre-feet. This will eliminate the need for ongoing special use permits, and also facilitate comprehensive watershed management strategies.

By eliminating the need for special use permits, this legislation will save an estimated \$150,000 in administrative costs incurred by both—or which would be incurred by both the city and the Forest Service. This is a narrowly-tailored, community-driven proposal that directly supports clean water, public safety, economic growth, and good government. I respectfully urge the Subcommittee's support for this important legislation, and look forward to engaging on this concept in today's hearing.

With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. We are now going to move on to our second panel.

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

Thank you, Ms. Shultzabarger, for coming up to the table.

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 now recognize Ms. Ellen Shultzabarger.

Am I saying your name correctly?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Shultzabarger, yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Associate Deputy Chief of the National Forest System at the United States Forest Service.

Associate Deputy Chief Shultzabarger, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ELLEN SHULTZABARGER, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Great, thank you. Good morning. Good morning, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Huffman, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity today to share the USDA Forest Service's perspective on two bills with Forest Service equities: H.R. 528, the Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025; and H.R. 655, The Dalles Watershed Development Act.

My name is Ellen Shultzabarger, and I am—as you said, currently serve as Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System. I am responsible for policy, management, and oversight of 193 million acres of National Forest System lands spanning from Puerto Rico to Alaska. The Forest Service manages these acres for many purposes, including things like timber, grazing, providing clean drinking water, and recreational opportunities.

Prior to joining the Forest Service in 2023 I spent over 20 years working in State forestry and natural resources. I last served as Pennsylvania State Forester for the Bureau of Forestry, where I was responsible for the oversight of 2 million acres of State forest lands and over 17 million acres of rural and community forests across Penn's Woods. At the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry I also worked in forest resource planning, forest ecology, plant and wildlife management.

I will provide a brief overview of the bills on today's agenda with Forest Service equities, and submit my full system—full statement for the record.

So H.R. 528, the Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025, directs the Secretary of the Interior to identify lands requiring reforestation and restoration following unplanned disturbances that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance.

The USDA strongly supports addressing post-disaster reforestation and restoration needs. The Forest Service has identified 3.5 million acres of reforestation needs on National Forest System lands. More than 90 percent of the needs are at—are as a result of unplanned disturbances such as wildfire. The Forest Service has been increasing reforestation actions on our national forests to address these critical reforestation needs in alignment with the REPLANT Act, so Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees Act.

H.R. 528 includes similar requirements to replant, including developing an annual list of projects and an annual report. Although H.R. 528 outlines more specific requirements around outreach and contract and agreement accounting, it does not give the Forest Service any additional authorities for implementing reforestation. While REPLANT pertains to the Forest Service and

not other Federal land management agencies, H.R. 528 pertains to the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with heads of Federal land management agencies such as the Forest Service.

USDA supports the intent of H.R. 528, and would like to work with the Committee further to ensure this bill does not supersede the agency's authority in the REPLANT Act or create duplicative processes and programs.

And for H.R. 655, The Dalles Watershed Development Act, it seeks to simplify the administrative requirements to operate the City of The Dalles Municipal Reservoir. H.R. 655 would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately 150 acres of land from the Mount Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles. The city's municipal watershed includes Crow Creek Dam and its reservoir, a portion of which is located on the Mount Hood. Given the location of the reservoir, the city has a Forest Service special use permit for operations and maintenance activities. Conveying this land would eliminate the administrative need for the permit, as well as the associated work for both the city and Forest Service staff.

We support H.R. 655, as the proposed acreage to be conveyed is relatively minor, reduces administrative oversight, and serves a specific purpose to meet the city's water management goals.

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member, this concludes my statement. I look forward to answering any questions. So thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shultzabarger follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELLEN SHULTZABARGER, ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, to discuss H.R. 528 and H.R. 655.

H.R. 528, "Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025"

H.R. 528 directs the Secretary of Interior in coordination with heads of federal land management agencies and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to identify lands requiring reforestation and restoration following unplanned disturbances that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance. The bill also requires an annual list of proposed projects for reforestation and restoration, and action to carry out priority projects. In addition, H.R. 528 requires the Secretary submit an annual report that includes an accounting of lands requiring reforestation and restoration, a list of priority projects and implementation progress, an accounting of related grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements, related outreach efforts, and assessments of, and recommendations relating to seed, seedling, and implementation gaps.

USDA strongly supports addressing post-disaster reforestation and restoration needs. The USFS has identified 3.5 million acres of reforestation needs on National Forest System Lands. More than 90% of the needs are a result of unplanned disturbances, mainly wildfire. The USFS has been increasing reforestation actions on our national forests to address these identified reforestation needs in alignment with the National Forest Management Act, as amended by the Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees (REPLANT) Act.

In FY 2024, the agency reforested a total of more than 230,000 acres through planting seedlings, direct seeding, and site preparation for natural regeneration and other actions to ensure forest regeneration. This is an increase of 30% over the last two years and is the highest level of reforestation accomplishments on National Forests since 2009. Additional activities were conducted on approximately more than 500,000 acres to evaluate and prepare sites for future reforestation actions and to monitor and steward completed reforestation treatments. As required by REPLANT, the USFS develops an annual list of priority projects and carries out annual reporting, among other requirements of the legislation.

H.R. 528 includes very similar requirements to REPLANT including developing an annual list of projects and an annual report. Although H.R. 528 outlines more specific requirements around outreach and accounting for specific contracts and agreements, it does not give the Forest Service any additional authorities for implementing reforestation. While REPLANT pertains to the Forest Service (and not other federal land management agencies), H.R. 528 pertains to the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with heads of federal land management agencies such as the Forest Service.

USDA supports the intent of this bill and would like to work with the Committee to ensure this bill does not supersede the agency's authority in the REPLANT Act or create duplicative processes and programs.

H.R. 655, "The Dalles Watershed Development Act"

H.R. 655, "The Dalles Watershed Development Act," seeks to simplify administrative requirements for the City of The Dalles, Oregon to operate its municipal reservoir. The bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately 150 acres of National Forest System (NFS) Land from the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City following written request to the Secretary for conveyance of the land within one year of enactment of the bill. The bill would also require that the conveyance would be subject to valid existing rights, made without consideration, made by quitclaim deed, and subject to such additional terms and conditions as the Secretary determines to be appropriate to protect the interests of the United States. In addition, the bill would direct the exact acreage and description of the land to be conveyed to be determined by a survey satisfactory to the Secretary and would direct the city to pay all costs associated with the conveyance, including the costs of the survey. USDA supports H.R. 655.

The City of The Dalles municipal watershed includes the Crow Creek Dam and its reservoir, a portion of which is located on NFS lands in the Mt. Hood National Forest. Due to the location of the reservoir, the city currently operates under a Forest Service special use permit for operations and maintenance activities. Conveying this land would eliminate the City's need for a special use permit and the associated work for both City and Forest Service staff. Following passage of this legislation, the conveyed land would remain primarily bordered by NFS lands which are managed as The Dalles Watershed Management Unit. Mt. Hood National Forest continues to partner closely with the City on fuels treatments to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires within the watershed.

The agency views this proposal as consistent with the City's water infrastructure upgrades and a sound course of action? The proposed acreage to be conveyed is relatively minor and serves a specific purpose to meet the City's water management goals.

Conclusion

That concludes my testimony. Again, I thank Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present USDA's views on this proposed legislation.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO THE ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF
ELLEN SHULTZABARGER

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

Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman

Question 1. What are the greatest impediments preventing the Forest Service from addressing the reforestation backlog across the National Forest System?

Question 2. The Forest Service announced last year it would use its emergency authorities to salvage areas affected by Hurricane Helene. Can you quantify how much time the Forest Service is saving by using these authorities and how that will help with broader reforestation and recovery efforts?

Question 3. What is the current backlog of acres in need of salvage in the National Forest System?

Question 4. On average, how long does it take to complete NEPA reviews for salvage and how does this process affect the ability of the Forest Service to carry out salvage activities in a timely manner?

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much for your testimony. I am going to recognize Representative Comer, and then we are going to come back for questions for you. If you would bear with us, I would really appreciate it.

I now recognize Representative Comer for 5 minutes on H.R. 1276.

Welcome, sir.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JAMES COMER, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF KENTUCKY**

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member. I am proud to speak today in support of my bill, H.R. 1276, which would return a parcel of land back to the City of Paducah, Kentucky.

I am honored to serve the people of Paducah in McCracken County in Congress. This is probably my biggest county. An integral part of their community is the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club, located on the land that is specified in this bill. For over 60 years the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club has been a force for good in Paducah, and has had a positive impact on thousands of children who have come through its doors.

Today the Boys and Girls Club is experiencing increased demand and a strain on their services. As a result, the current facility is no longer large enough, leading to a waiting list of over 100 children. The city has owned the land since 2012, with the National Park Service retaining an interest in the property following the transfer because of the city's participation in the Federal Lands to Parks program. Passing H.R. 1276 would empower local officials to fully transfer the property to the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club and allow the organization to renovate and improve its facilities.

I am grateful to the Mayor of Paducah, George Bray, for being here today to share his support for the bill and to speak to the positive impact its passage will have on the Boys and Girls Club and the youth of Paducah. I appreciate the Mayor and the city's collaboration on this effort.

The club, the City of Paducah, and community members stand ready to support the expansion and renovation of this building. Still, the remaining restrictions from the Park Service has been an obstacle to raising the necessary funds and executing the project. There is no time to waste in making this common-sense fix to enable this project to move forward. H.R. 1276 is a result of collaboration with the City of Paducah, the National Park Service, and all other local stakeholders to ensure that the Federal Government's unnecessary role in this property is no longer an obstacle.

I also take this opportunity to thank Senator Paul for introducing the Senate companion bill, 601, and Senator McConnell for being an original co-sponsor. I look forward to working with

them to get this bill across the finish line and to President Trump's desk.

I have two letters of support from local leaders in Paducah: State Representative Randy Bridges, and former State Representative and past chair of the Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce, Brent Housman, who recognize the significant impact that H.R. 1276 will have on the community. I ask unanimous consent to enter these two letters into the record.

Mr. TIFFANY. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Commonwealth of Kentucky

April 28, 2025

Hon. Tom Tiffany, Chair
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Subject

Dear Representative Tiffany:

Please accept this letter of support for the legislative bill H.R. 1276 by Representative James Comer that would remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky. H.R. 1276 would remove the deed restrictions on the property on Park Avenue where the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club currently occupies. This will open the door for the club to finally own the facility it has used for over 12 years.

Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club has served as an integral part of the Paducah community for over 70 years. Each year, hundreds of kids walk through those doors and receive positive programs and opportunities in the after school and summer programs. I support Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club's wish to expand the current facility. This well-warranted wish will provide a better sense of community and would allow the club to serve more children in the years to come.

Once again, I endorse this measure fully. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. As always, do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions or if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

RANDY BRIDGES,
State Representative,
3rd House District

BAIRD

April 27, 2025

House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Subject

To Whom it may Concern:

Please accept this letter of support of Mayor George Bray and the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club located in Paducah, KY. The Club has been a vital part of our community for over 70 years. Each year, hundreds of kids walk through those doors and receive positive programs and opportunities in our After School and Summer Programs. We are calling on and urging the Federal Lands Subcommittee to pass the legislative bill (H.R. 1276) to remove deed restrictions on the property in Paducah (Park Ave) that the Boys & Girls Club has occupied for the last 12 years.

To this point, the Club has made only been able to make minor facility upgrades and repairs, but the Board of Directors, along with several community stakeholders, staff, and parents, see the need to make significant investments to expand the current facility to allow the Club to serve more kids in the years to come. The passage of H.R. 1276 will open the door for the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club to finally own the facility and to be able to invest and make significant capital improvements to this location. This will allow the Club to be able to give the youth in our community even more opportunities moving forward once the facility is released.

Thank you for your consideration of this very important resolution, not just for the Club, but also for the community of Paducah, Kentucky .

If I can be of further assistance or comment, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I can be reached via email at bhousrnan@rwbaird.com or by phone at 270-366-6611.

Thank you in advance for your consideration,

Sincerely,

BRENT HOUSMAN,
Former State Representative
Past Chair, Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce

Mr. COMER. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity and urge the swift passage of H.R. 1276.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields.

Mr. COMER. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you for your testimony.

We are now going to turn to questions from Members for our witness, Ms. Shultzabarger. And first I will turn to the gentleman from Oregon, Mr. Bentz, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I appreciate these new microphones, although the feedback is annoying. Is there something—yes, we will try that. A dramatic improvement, Mr. Chair, over what we used to have in this room, so I am appreciative of whatever you did to make this happen. I am appreciative.

Ms. Shultzabarger, Associate Deputy Chief, the Mount Hood National Forest is about 1.1 million acres, and we are asking for 150 acres to go to the city, which will be incredibly important to the city. I really appreciate you being here today to testify in support of this bill. It is extremely important to the city, and it will dramatically reduce that administrative cost you alluded to.

So if you would care to expand on that just briefly, because, to me, it is an excellent result for a modest transfer of land and for a very, very, very specific need, all of which you mentioned. And since you did take the time to be here, again I want to thank you for that. Maybe you could just say a few words about the administrative costs that will be avoided by virtue of this transfer.

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Sure, great. Thanks so much for the question.

And first, at least I will say that, from what I hear from the staff on the ground, we have a really good relationship with the City of The Dalles, and lots of good management that is coming out between the city and the Forest Service in this area. There has been a lot of collaborative work to manage it and also manage that watershed, the entire watershed around it.

As far as the conveyance, typically this is the type of things that we would go through a—and have authority to convey, so those small-scale exchanges to address things like, you know, administrative needs or boundary issues. And here there is some wonkiness with the fact that part of it is city land and part of its Federal service and—or Forest Service. And in this situation it makes sense to make that adjustment, and we are thankful for the good relationship that we have on the ground to make sure that the watershed management is sound and will continue that with the city.

Mr. BENTZ. I thank you for that. The importance of this is driven by the fact that the City of Dalles is growing and has added different new businesses that are dependent upon the water supply, so this is hugely important to the city. I know we would eventually get there, even if the Forest Service owned the land, but it would take a great deal more effort and money, and there is no reason, when we are all trying to go in the same direction, for that kind of expense. So again, thank you so much for being here. I appreciate your input.

With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Neguse.

Mr. NEGUSE. New technology. There we go. I am struggling as Mr. Bentz was.

It is good to be here. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your testimony. I want to make sure I pronounce your last name right. Could you pronounce that?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Shultzabarger.

Mr. NEGUSE. Shultzabarger, all right. Well, thank you, Ms. Shultzabarger, for being here and for your service.

I spent the last few weeks back in Colorado. And as you may know, I represent a very large district in northern and western Colorado. It spans 12 counties, 3 national forests—Arapahoe, Roosevelt, White River, which is, of course, the most visited national forest in the United States, and Routt National Forest. And I can tell you that, having traveled my district and holding multiple town halls in every corner of my district, folks are deeply concerned and frustrated by the actions of this Administration with respect to the gutting, in their view and in my view, of the Forest Service.

For years we have worked in partnership with folks at the Forest Service as we protect our treasured public lands that we are so blessed to have in our State. And to see the way in which this Administration is gutting the Federal workforce—not just, of course, with respect to the Forest Service, but the National Park Service, a variety of other agencies in the land management context—is unconscionable, and it is having a real-world dramatic effect in Colorado, as I suspect you are probably aware of.

And I will just give you one example. I was in Yampa, in the Yampa Valley, and visiting with the Yampa Valley Sustainability Council in Routt County. They had a planned collaborative reforestation project for wildfire-impacted lands planned for this spring. I know we are talking about reforestation today with respect to one of the bills that we are considering. That project was canceled because of the various cuts and drawbacks and rollbacks at the Forest Service. This project would have planted 100,000 seedlings in the burn area, and the future viability of this project is now in question.

So I know, you know, you are, of course, a career official, and I appreciate your commitment to the Forest Service and to our country. But I have to level with you on behalf of my constituents, and I hope you will convey back to your colleagues at the Forest Service and in management at the Forest Service that what is happening is having real-world consequences on the ground across western United States.

To that end, my question is really a simple one, and it is in regards to wildfire season that we are, of course, preparing for in Colorado and across the Rocky Mountain West. As you know, there are many individuals at the Forest Service who were unceremoniously purged from the agency, and many of these folks are red card holders. How many do you know, red card holders, have been terminated from the agency over the course of the last 100 days?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Thank you for the question, and I will take back some of the information you shared earlier to my colleagues.

As far as—I don't have the exact number on the red card, and we can get that for you and submit that. But generally, I can speak to what we have been doing in the Forest Service as far as implementing this workforce shaping.

So first, as far as the probationary staff, those that were on-the-ground fire support staff were not included in that. And all of the probationary staff have been brought back, and I think we have got maybe 80 to 90 percent have, you know, decided to come back.

As far as the other options that we had out there with voluntary early retirement or the deferred resignation, that also was not offered to those firefighters on the ground. However, there may be some administrative staff that are—that were part of that.

So what we are doing right now—

Mr. NEGUSE. Can I just—can I clarify it for a moment?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Sure.

Mr. NEGUSE. I know I have limited time.

One, I would just say, in my view, a nonsensical approach with respect to the individuals that you mentioned who are on the ground, the fact that the Administration terminated a wide swath of them, probationary status employees, as you articulated, only to then bring them back, I don't know how that process is possibly in the best interests of the communities that I represent.

Secondly, I would say my understanding—and I would appreciate if you all could follow up in writing—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes.

Mr. NEGUSE [continuing]. Is that there were upwards of 3,000—3,000—red card holders, right? So these are folks that are certified to assist with wildfire response that the Trump administration has terminated from the Forest Service.

And again, I just have to level with you. For the folks in my district and my State that I represent who have been, year after year after year, on the front lines of dealing and grappling with these historic wildfires, some of the largest in the history of Colorado, firing 3,000 red card holders is just not a smart move.

And I would encourage the Administration—and again, I recognize, of course, your status as a career official, but I would hope you will relay my sentiments back to the Administration. Now is not the time for the Administration to take these kinds of risks.

So I see I am out of time, so I will yield back. I thank the Chairman for his indulgence.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I am going to take a few minutes here for questioning also here, Ms. Shultzabarger.

So in your testimony I noted that there is 3.5 million acres of reforestation needs on the National Forest System lands that are mainly due to wildfires. Is that right?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Mostly, forest health issues.

Mr. TIFFANY. What is the greatest impediment preventing the Forest Service from addressing that backlog?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, thank you for that question, and I will first start with some of the positive pieces is we actually have made a lot of progress over the past few years, given the understanding and interest towards the need for this restoration

and reforestation from—when we signed on to the Trillion Trees Initiative back in 2020 to 2024, we planted—or, you know, restored about almost a million acres, so 917,000. And then, if looking from now over the past 5 years, we are looking at planning another million. So we have the opportunity to make some significant impacts.

However, you know, there are always challenges on the ground. And one of the hardest things for us is the capacity to get in there to do site prep, and get sites ready to go, and determine what type of restoration is needed. Is natural regeneration an option? Do we need to seed? Do we need to plan? So having that capacity, either internal or external, where we are able to get out there and do the work.

And often the folks that are doing this work are also doing some of the other similar priorities that we have in timber or fuels reduction. So, you know, there is—the capacity and the folks to be able to do that.

The other piece is being able to get in there and do larger site prep areas so that then, when we get back in there to do that type of restoration work, we can do it more quickly and efficiently.

Mr. TIFFANY. Do you believe you made progress over the last couple of years—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, we definitely—

Mr. TIFFANY [continuing]. With that backlog?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. We have, but we certainly have a lot of acreage that we have identified and appreciate the understanding and support that you all and others have in this area.

Mr. TIFFANY. It was announced by the Forest Service last year they would use emergency authorities in salvage areas like with Hurricane Helene. Can you quantify if there are time savings that are going on with that, that projects are able to get done more expeditiously?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Very good question. I don't have that quantifying ability right now, but we can look into that and get that to you.

And certainly, it helps in those areas where we are working after a fire or after a hurricane to be able to get in there and do work quickly. And so that ability and that emergency authority helps with that. Time is most certainly of the essence in those disturbed—

Mr. TIFFANY. What is the impact when salvage is not done promptly? What is the impact both economically, but also ecologically?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, ecologically it certainly has an impact, either safety or—then the—what—safety and security-wise, if it is a recreation area, and then also ecologically, you know, the disturbance may bring a, you know, unhealthy forest back. But if you think about the wildfire risk in those areas with high wildfire risk, it certainly increases that.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is it accurate, when some of these fires that burned so hot, that they actually sterilized the soil?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. In some instances.

Mr. TIFFANY. So what are you going to do—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. It impacts the soil.

Mr. TIFFANY. What do you do in an instance like that to be able to allow that to recover?

I mean, sterilization sounds like stuff isn't coming back for a while.

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Right, and that—when I answered your first question—I think it was your first—about the capacity, and one of the things that is a challenge for us is that site prep to understand what happens, to do soil modifications and soil prep if needed. And so it all depends on how and where for us to get in there and determine what those next steps are. So that prep is important.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. So would it be accurate that it is more costly? When you see a soil that is sterilized like that, you are going to have to take extra—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Right, so you might—

Mr. TIFFANY [continuing]. Effort to—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER [continuing]. Have to do a couple—a larger prep, as opposed to if something is barely impacted you can just come in and maybe do some replanting. Or seeding would be the easiest. So a lot of our work is figuring out what we need to do—

Mr. TIFFANY. So it could—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER [continuing]. And doing it.

Mr. TIFFANY. So it could have a real fiscal consequences for the agency—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Correct.

Mr. TIFFANY [continuing]. When you have to do something like that—

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Correct.

Mr. TIFFANY [continuing]. That is going to take more time, energy, and money, right?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, yes, OK. Well, I really appreciate you being here today.

And next I am going to recognize the gentlewoman from New Mexico for 5 minutes of questioning if she would like.

Ms. STANSBURY. Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate it.

And I want to say welcome and thank you to the Associate Deputy Chief for being here with us today. I know that you are here as a career staffer, and I do genuinely thank you for your service to our Nation, and to all of our Federal career staff out there, and I do want to ask some questions about preparation for this fire season and how current actions happening inside the Forest Service are impacting that.

But I think it is important to zoom out a little bit and look at the broader narrative unfolding right now. You know, as of today, this is the hundredth day of the current Administration. And I think, for many people, you know, you hear little pieces of what has been happening out in the field, but I am just wrapping up a 15-stop town hall tour across my district. And I cover 10 rural counties in central New Mexico. We have a lot of forested land, a number of different mountain ranges and national forests in my district. And a lot of Forest Service employees actually came out to my town halls because they are my constituents. And I think the

Forest Service is really a case in point in the impacts that this Administration is having on the Federal service's ability to carry out its mandates and missions.

So I think we all know the bigger story here. You know, the President took office in mid-January. Over the last 100 days there has been mass firings. Probationary staff, people who were changing job titles were fired, they were laid off. We have career Forest Service staff who have served in the Forest Service for 30 years who got a random email 1 day telling them they were being fired without cause. Then they were not, you know, sure if their jobs were going to be offered to them again. We have firefighters that have not been hired for the season. We have temporary workers that are needed to prepare for this season. And in my district, our communities experienced the largest wildfire ever in the history of our State last summer, and they are still recovering. They are still trying to prepare for the upcoming flood and fire season. And literally thousands of Forest Service workers don't know if they are going to have their jobs tomorrow.

So I want to say this first and foremost. A lot of Federal workers are afraid to say this out loud, so I want to say this here, in front of this hearing: We see you, we hear you, we are fighting for you on the Democratic side. And we know that this Administration has created a culture of fear and chaos within the Forest Service, and that that is impacting your jobs. Please stay. Please continue to work for our communities because we need you, we need our Forest Service workers out there because in New Mexico we have had the lowest snowpack in recorded history this winter, and we are about to face a catastrophic fire season. And we need our Forest Service workers out on the ground doing the work. So I want to say that.

Associate Deputy, I know you can't answer for this Administration, but can you tell us—you know, you work, of course, with Forest Service staff across the country. How have these funding freezes and employment freezes and firings affected the capacity of the Forest Service to prepare for the upcoming season?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Thank you. Thank you for the question.

And we have a long history of preparing for disaster and events like the wildfire season, but I guess a couple things to answer your question is, you know, as far as the positions that have been part of that workforce shaping the fire, on-the-ground fire positions have not been [sic]. So we are in the process of identifying if any of those folks that used the early retirement or the deferred resignation were part of that operational, you know, staffing that supports it and outside of that on the ground.

So we are looking at where we have any gaps and making sure to fill any of those. And we are, you know, voluntary reassigning staff to those areas. And we are continuing to hire to have that goal of 11,300 operational firefighters, and we feel that we will be ready for the fire season.

Ms. STANSBURY. With all due respect, Deputy Chief, that is just not true. I have been on the ground for the last couple of months, and Forest Service employees are terrified they are going to lose their jobs. People are leaving in large numbers, and thousands of people have been fired and not rehired.

So while I appreciate that that is the company line here in this hearing, and I understand the position that you are in, it is just factually untrue. We are not prepared for this fire season, and it will fall on this Administration for failing to uphold its responsibilities, both legally and morally, to our communities as we face this fire season. And we are going to continue to fight back at every step of the way.

I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields back. Does the gentleman from Utah have any questions for the witness?

Dr. KENNEDY. Thank you, Mr. Chair. No, I do not. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields back. I want to thank you, Ms. Shultzabarger, for joining us today. We appreciate it very much.

OK, we are going to move on to our third panel. While the clerk resets our witness table, I will remind the witnesses as you come up that, under Committee rules, they must—you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but the entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

I would also like to remind our witnesses of the timing lights, which will turn red at the end of your 5-minute statement, and to please remember to turn on your microphone.

As with the second panel, I will allow all witnesses to testify before member questioning.

Well, first of all, I am going to—I would like to introduce The Honorable Richard Mays, Mayor of The Dalles, Oregon.

Mayor Mays, you are recognized for your testimony for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. RICHARD MAYS, MAYOR, CITY OF THE DALLES, THE DALLES, OREGON

Mr. MAYS. Thank you very much. My name is Rich Mays, and I am the Mayor in the City of The Dalles, Oregon. Previous to the 6 years I have spent as mayor, my professional career included 28 years as a city manager in four different cities in Oregon, Illinois, and Missouri. Thank you for inviting me here to testify regarding this very important issue to our city, residents, and our businesses.

The City of The Dalles in Wasco County is located on the south side of the Columbia River, about 80 miles east of Portland. We have a population of about 16,000 people, as Congressman Bentz indicated, up 17.5 percent from the 2010 census and 29.5 percent from the year 2000.

I have come here today to request passage of H.R. 655, titled The Dalles Watershed Development Act. This bill was introduced by Congressman Bentz in January of this year, and calls for the transfer of approximately 150 acres of U.S. Forest Service land located in the Mount Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles.

Our municipal watershed contributes about 80 percent of the city's water supply, and is located on both city-owned lands and areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The city-owned portions are primarily managed to protect water quality and promote healthy forest conditions, ensuring a consistent and reliable water supply for our residents and businesses.

Two critical components of this watershed are the city-owned Crow Creek Dam and its associated reservoir which form the backbone of the city's water supply infrastructure, and some of the dam and reservoir lie on city-owned property. Some sections extend onto Forest Service lands, necessitating, as Deputy Chief Shultzabarger pointed out, a special use permit and its related administrative work for both city and Forest Service staff for operation and maintenance.

The city's Comprehensive Water Master Plan calls for millions of dollars' worth of improvements to our infrastructure to accommodate our future water supply needs. The Crow Creek Dam and its associated reservoir are two components of these improvements necessary to achieve the goals of that master plan. We would certainly appreciate acquiring ownership of those Forest Service lands where the city's necessary and costly infrastructure improvements are to be located.

The transfer of U.S. Forest Service lands within The Dalles municipal watershed to city ownership is a critical first step in addressing the city's long-term water management and water supply needs. This ownership will facilitate essential infrastructure upgrades to increase reservoir capacity and improve water quality, while also enabling the city to implement a comprehensive multi-decades growth model for water resource management.

In conclusion, by enhancing local—our local water system and supporting economic growth, this legislative action ensures the sustainability and operational efficiency of The Dalles water supply for decades to come.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and I will be happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mays follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RICHARD MAYS, MAYOR, CITY OF THE DALLES

RE: H.R. 655—"The Dalles Watershed Development Act"—Land Transfer Between the U.S. Forest Service and The City of The Dalles, Oregon

The City of The Dalles respectfully requests passage of H.R. 655 titled THE DALLES WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT ACT. This bill was introduced in January of 2025 by Congressman Cliff Bentz and calls for the transfer of approximately 150 acres of USFS land located in the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles.

The City currently receives about 85% of its water supply from a watershed that consists of lands owned by both the USFS and the City. The land is managed for the protection of water quality as a municipal supply for the 16,000 residents of the City and is critical to meeting the City's current and future water supply needs.

Much of the City's annual summer water supply has historically been provided as a result of snowmelt. Projections indicate decreasing snowpacks so the importance of surface water storage to meet municipal water demand will become increasingly critical in order to provide resiliency for the City's water utility.

The City's Crow Creek Dam and Water Reservoir are located mostly on City owned land but also partially on land owned and administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The City of The Dalles desires and requests acquisition of these USFS properties to consolidate its ownership of Crow Creek Dam and Reservoir in order to improve management practices and to increase storage.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mayor Mays. I will now recognize the Honorable George Bray, Mayor of Paducah, Kentucky.

Mayor Bray, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. GEORGE P. BRAY, MAYOR, CITY OF
PADUCAH, PADUCAH, KENTUCKY**

Mr. BRAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. It is truly an honor for a mayor representing the largest city in far western Kentucky to speak today in support of H.R. 1276, which removes restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky, introduced by Congressman James Comer.

Since 2013 this property has been the home of the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club. The land was conveyed to the City of Paducah by the National Park Service through the Federal Lands to Parks program in 2012, with a restriction that will impede the positive changes and improvements that need to be made at the Boys and Girls Club.

Boys and Girls Clubs of America serve over 3 million young people through 5,400 clubs nationwide. On any given day, 350,000 kids and teens attend a Boys and Girls Club. The work they do helping kids who need the opportunity to make something of themselves, and for many to become leaders, is truly legendary. And they do it the right way, through a variety of resources relying primarily on private contributions and community leadership.

The Oscar Cross Club itself serves hundreds of children each year through after-school and summer programs. However, the current facility has reached its limits and it is unable to accommodate the growing demand for its services. In 2024 the club had 258 members, but could only accommodate 120 children at a time, leading to a wait list of over 100 youth at certain times. The board of directors and community partners are eager to expand the facilities to meet growing demand.

However, the city's ownership of the building with Federal restrictions is a massive barrier to making that investment a reality. A larger facility would mean that the Boys and Girls Club would be able to increase capacity, develop innovative programs, renovate existing spaces, and build stronger relationships with local schools, businesses, and organizations. The club has a long history of adapting to meet the needs of our community, but space and resources have been ongoing challenges.

Oscar Cross founded the Boys and Girls Club in my hometown in 1949, and it was chartered nationally in 1953. Cross's visionary leadership led to the formation of one of the first desegregated board of directors, helping to lead the integration of Black youth into Boys and Girls Clubs across the country. Oscar Cross, a civic leader and the first Black juvenile officer in McCracken County, dedicated 50 years to the club, transforming it into a vital community resource. His efforts were recognized with numerous awards, including the Boys and Girls Club Herman Prescott Award for promoting equality. The club was renamed in his honor in 1980, and continues to empower young people, fostering academic achievement, good character, and citizenship.

Since 2013 the club has been located at 2956 Park Avenue, thanks to a partnership with the City of Paducah, whereby the city I lead leases the location to the Oscar Cross Club. The location has successfully increased visibility and support for the club. I have been a long-term supporter and advocate for the club during my time as Mayor of Paducah and when I served 20 years on its board

of directors prior to my first election. As a board member and chief advisor, I helped raise the money and lead the move to this location.

The club has been a beacon of hope and growth for children in our community, providing a safe and nurturing environment where kids can learn, grow, and thrive. With the passage of this legislation we have the opportunity to expand our facility and continue its long legacy of serving Paducah's children at the Oscar Cross Club. We have a \$1 million grant from the State of Kentucky waiting, and a long list of donors eager to provide funding to be used for the much-needed renovation.

I want to thank Congressman Comer for introducing the bill; Senator Paul for introducing the companion Senate bill; and my friend, Senator Mitch McConnell, for being an original co-sponsor.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to voice my strong support for the passage of H.R. 1276, and I will be happy to take any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bray follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GEORGE P. BRAY, MAYOR, CITY OF PADUCAH

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, It is truly an honor for a Mayor representing the largest City in Western Kentucky to speak today in support of H.R. 1276, which removes restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky, introduced by Congressman James Comer. Since 2013, this property has been the home of the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club.

This land was conveyed to the City of Paducah by the National Park Service, through the Federal Lands to Parks Program, in 2012, with a restriction that will impede the positive changes and improvements that need to be made at the Boys and Girls Club.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America serve over 3 million young people through 5,400 clubs nationwide. On any given day 350,000 kids and teens attend a boys & Girls Club. The work they do helping kids who need the opportunity to make something of themselves and for many to become leaders is truly legendary. And they do it the right way, through a variety of resources relying primarily on private contributions and community leadership.

The Oscar Cross club itself serves hundreds of children each year through after-school and summer programs. However, the current facility has reached its limits, and it is unable to accommodate the growing demand for its services. In 2024, the club had 258 members but could only accommodate 120 children at a time, leading to a waitlist of over 100 youth at times. The Board of Directors and community partners are eager to expand the facilities to meet growing demand. However, the city's ownership of the building with federal restrictions is a massive barrier to making that investment a reality.

A larger facility would mean that the Boys and Girls Club would be able to increase capacity, develop innovative programs, renovate existing spaces, and build stronger relationships with local schools, businesses, and organizations. The Club has a long history of adapting to meet the needs of our community, but space and resources have been ongoing challenges.

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time as Mayor of Paducah and when I served 20 years on its board of directors prior to my first telecom. As a board member and chief advisor, I helped raise money and lead the move to this location.

This Club has been a beacon of hope and growth for children in our community, providing a safe and nurturing environment where kids can learn, grow, and thrive. With the passage of this legislation, we have the opportunity to expand our facility and continue its long legacy of serving Paducah's children at the Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club. We have a \$1M grant from the State of Kentucky waiting and a long list of donors eager to provide funding to be used for the much-needed renovation.

I want to thank Congressman Comer for introducing this bill, Senator Paul for introducing the companion Senate bill, and Senator McConnell for being an original cosponsor. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to voice my strong support for the passage of H.R. 1276 and I'm happy to take any questions.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Mayor Bray. I now recognize Mr. Matthew McCombs, State Forester and Director of the Colorado State Forest Service.

Director McCombs, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW M. McCOMBS, STATE FORESTER AND DIRECTOR, COLORADO STATE FOREST SERVICE, FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

Mr. McCOMBS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And Mr.—Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse and members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to be here today.

My name again is Matt McCombs, and I serve as the State Forester of Colorado and the Director of the Colorado State Forest Service. I am here to express strong support for H.R. 528, the Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act, which creates a new direction for covered agencies to track reforestation needs, expand partnerships through existing funding through contracts and cooperative agreements, encourages the consultation with States and Tribes and other partners on priority projects, and identifies outstanding funding needs, which is critical. It offers an important initial step to understand the Nation's reforestation backlog and galvanize partnership to move forward.

Colorado is no stranger to natural disasters, including frequent severe wildfires and flash floods. In recent years our State has seen large and destructive wildfires that consume vast areas of forest land. Many of those fires occur on Federal lands that border our communities, contain our critical watersheds, and provide our economic lifelines through Colorado's world famous outdoor recreation opportunities.

Take the 2020 fire season, when Colorado experienced its three largest wildfires in history. Those megafires scorched over a half million acres in Colorado experienced significant post-fire flooding issues. Five years later we are still working to restore those landscapes but limited Federal capacity, gaps in funding and knowledge, and fragmented coordination has slowed recovery. This bill directly addresses those challenges.

We also know one negative outcome of severe wildfires is that the seed source needed to naturally regenerate the forest can be consumed by the intensity of the fire. This can reduce or eliminate the opportunity for the areas to recover without human

intervention. There is a critical need to reforest impacted lands after natural disasters to reestablish forest cover and stabilize watersheds in riparian areas.

Prior to the 2020 fire season the Hayman Fire was our largest wildfire in Colorado. More than 20 years after that fire, many areas within its burn scar remain without trees. But targeted reforestation in strategic areas has been successful in bringing forests back to some burned lands. This bill would support those continued efforts.

H.R. 528 recognizes that reforestation is not just a conservation issue, it is a community resilience issue. Our forests provide clean water and air, offer abundant opportunities for recreation, house our wild neighbors, and support jobs in rural economies. In Colorado alone, over 80 percent of our municipal water supplies originate in forested watersheds, many of them on Federal lands. Colorado's forested watersheds provide a vital water supply for millions of Americans downstream on both sides of the Continental Divide. Wildfires can have a catastrophic effect on drinking water as debris flows and degraded water quality damage infrastructure and disrupt treatment processes for years after the fire. The more quickly that burned watersheds are reforested, the better protected drinking water supplies will be.

This legislation would allow the Department of the Interior to work in lockstep with States, Tribes, local governments and—to prioritize reforestation and recovery efforts after disasters. It reflects the type of Federal-State collaboration we need: flexible, proactive, and locally informed.

Importantly, the bill also supports workforce development. In Colorado we are building a workforce pipeline through a revitalization of our State nursery and forest restoration projects. With the right investments, post-fire restoration can fuel rural economies from seed collection to nursery production to planting trees while repairing our landscapes for a warmer, drier climate.

I urge the Committee to advance this important bill. It is smart, it is a timely bill that helps us move forward and be—away from being reactive, but being proactive in recovery to strategic restoration, ensuring our forests can remain as forests in our communities and watersheds not only heal, but come back stronger. Thank you, and I look forward to questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McCombs follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT MATTHEW M. MCCOMBS, STATE FORESTER AND DIRECTOR,
COLORADO STATE FOREST SERVICE

H.R. 528: (Rep. Pettersen), “Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025” Congressional Testimony, Colorado State Forester Matt McCombs, April 29, 2025

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Matthew McCombs, and I serve as the State Forester of Colorado. I'm here to express strong support for H.R. 528, the Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act, which creates new direction for Interior Bureaus to track reforestation needs, expand partnerships through existing funding, contract and cooperative agreement instruments, consult with states, tribes, and other partners on priority projects and identify outstanding funding needs. It offers an important initial step to understand the Department's reforestation backlog and galvanize partnerships to respond.

Colorado is no stranger to natural disasters including frequent, severe wildfires and flash floods. In recent years, our state has seen large and destructive wildfires that consume vast areas of forestland—many of those fires occur on federal lands that border our communities, contain our critical watersheds, and provide our economic lifelines through Colorado’s world-famous outdoor recreation opportunities.

Take the 2020 fire season, when Colorado experienced its three largest wildfires in history. Those megafires scorched over a half-million acres and Colorado experienced significant post-fire flooding issues. Five years later, we’re still working to restore those landscapes. But limited federal capacity, gaps in funding and knowledge, and fragmented coordination have slowed recovery. This bill directly addresses those challenges.

We also know one negative outcome of severe wildfires is that the seed source needed to naturally regenerate the forest can be consumed by the fire. This can reduce or eliminate the opportunity for the areas to recover without human intervention. There is a critical need to reforest impacted lands after natural disasters to re-establish forest cover and stabilize watersheds and riparian areas.

Prior to the 2020 fire season, the Hayman Fire was our largest wildfire in Colorado. More than 20 years after that fire, many areas within its burn scar remain without trees—but targeted reforestation in strategic areas has been successful in bringing forests back to some burned lands. This bill supports those efforts.

H.R. 528 recognizes that reforestation is not just a conservation issue—it’s a community resilience issue. Our forests provide clean water and air, offer abundant opportunities for recreation, house our wild neighbors, and support jobs and rural economies.

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This legislation would allow the Department of the Interior to work in lockstep with states, Tribes, local governments, and NGOs to prioritize reforestation and recovery efforts after disasters. It reflects the type of federal-state collaboration we need—flexible, proactive, and locally informed.

Importantly, the bill also supports workforce development. In Colorado, we’re building a workforce pipeline through a revitalization of our state nursery and forest restoration projects. With the right investments, post-fire restoration can fuel rural economies—from seed collection to nursery production to planting trees—while preparing our landscapes for a warmer, dryer climate.

I urge the Committee to advance H.R. 528. It’s a smart, timely bill that helps us move from reactive recovery to strategic restoration—ensuring our forests can remain as forests and our communities and watersheds not only heal but come back stronger.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Director McCombs.

Finally, I would like to recognize Mr. Taylor Randall, President of the University of Utah.

President Randall, you have 5 minutes for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF TAYLOR R. RANDALL, PRESIDENT,
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

Dr. RANDALL. Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and other members of the Subcommittee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today in support of the University of Utah Research Park Act, or H.R. 2876.

Numerous universities operate research parks, sometimes referred to as innovation districts. Research parks support new and emerging growth companies that commercialize university technologies, promote further development of those technologies,

and create tremendous employment opportunities. Research parks such as the one at Stanford University offer buildings for lease by private companies, incubators supporting newly-formed companies, laboratory space, as well as recreation and other amenities for park community members such as cafes, coffee shops, retail stores, housing, and transportation services.

The University of Utah's Research Park operates consistently with many of those university-affiliated parks across the United States. And because of its significant value to the university and the surrounding community, the university has invested and hopes to continue to invest significant institutional resources for the operation and improvement of our Research Park.

The University of Utah's Research Park is located on land that was acquired by the university from the Department of the Interior in 1968. The patent transferring this land requires that the university use this land for university purposes, consistent with the Recreation and Public Purpose Act, or the RPPA. Operation of the Research Park is a valid purpose under the RPPA according to the assurances previously provided to the University by the Department of the Interior.

In 1968, the original petition requesting transfer of the lands on which the university operates the park, the university expressly stated its intent to use a portion of the land as a research park. Importantly, our petition acknowledged that the operation of a research park might present a novel use of the land under the RPPA. Consequently, we suggested that the Department of the Interior believed it more—if the Department of the Interior believed it more appropriate, the land could instead—the university could instead use its land grant entitlement to acquire the land.

Nonetheless, in that time period, the Department granted this land to the university under the RPPA, based on the university's description of its intended uses. In fact, by letter dated December 10, 1970, then-Secretary of the Interior Fred J. Russell expressly confirmed that the university's operation of a research park on these lands is a valid purpose under the RPPA.

Following 1970 and until very recently, the BLM has not objected to the university's operation of a research park. In good faith and reliance on the Department of the Interior's assurances, the university has invested significant institutional resources in the development of a research park to ensure that it fulfills its mandate for public benefit. Research Park has become a successful innovation hub for Utah. It is home to dozens of companies and many university departments, with a combined workforce totaling more than 14,000 employees. The university hopes to continue making significant improvements to Research Park. However, the BLM recently informed the university that the commercial, residential, and transportation uses associated with the research park—typically associated with research parks are problematic under the RPPA.

The university understands the questions the Department of the Interior might have regarding whether operation of a research park qualifies as a valid purpose contemplated by the RPPA. The university acknowledged this much in its original petition for the grant, as demonstrated by the university's offer to receive the land

pursuant to the university's land grant entitlements. However, this question of use was resolved long ago, as demonstrated by the written materials that the university has submitted to this Committee.

Nonetheless, in order to put this issue to rest and to provide guidance to both the university and the BLM, the university respectfully requests that this Committee vote in favor of the University of Utah Research Park Act. It is critical to the university, the State of Utah, and the Federal Government that the university's Research Park continue to succeed. If the university is now prohibited from improving Research Park in ways that ensure its continued success as has recently been suggested by the BLM, progress made to date will be undone, and significant public and private investments in the park will be wasted.

We encourage you to vote in favor of the University of Utah Research Park Act. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Randall follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TAYLOR R. RANDALL, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Research Park Act, H.R. 2876

1. Presentation:

a. Personal Introduction:

i. I am Taylor Randall, President of the University of Utah, the flagship public institution of higher education in Utah. ii. I'm here in support of the University of Utah Research Park Act.

b. Brief Summary of Issue: *The University asks that Congress affirm the University's operation of Research Park under the RPPA, in response to recent BLM concerns*

i. For more than fifty years, University of Utah has successfully operated a research park on land the Department of the Interior granted to the University under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, or RPPA.

ii. The Research Park contributes significantly to development of new technologies and facilitates valuable academic and research collaborations among private companies and University faculty members and students.

iii. For the State of Utah, Research Park is an important economic catalyst, and proposed improvements to Research Park will significantly increase these benefits.

iv. BLM, on behalf of the Department of the Interior, has indicated that such improvements, as well as historical park development, might be prohibited by the RPPA.

v. BLM has taken this position notwithstanding more than fifty-five years of the Department's approval (tacit and express) of the Research Park.

vi. The University of Utah Research Park Act will confirm, for both the University and the BLM, that operation of the Research Park on this land is an allowed use under the RPPA.

vii. This assurance includes University plans to improve the park to increase its academic and research value, as well as its economic return to the State of Utah and its citizens. viii. The University of Utah strongly supports enactment of H.R. 2876.

c. *What are the purposes of research parks and what makes them so valuable?*

i. Numerous U.S. universities operate research parks, sometimes referred to as innovation districts.

ii. Research parks support new and emerging-growth companies that commercialize university technologies, promote further development of those technologies, and create employment opportunities.

iii. Research parks offer buildings for lease by private companies, incubators supporting newly formed companies, laboratory space, as well as recreation and other amenities for park community members such as cafes, coffee shops, retail stores, housing and transportation services.

iv. University of Utah's Research Park operates consistently with the many university-affiliated parks across the United States.

v. Because of its significant value to the University and surrounding community, the University has invested, and hopes to continue to invest, significant institutional resources for the operation of and improvement to Research Park.

d. How does operation of the University's Research Park relate to the RPPA?

i. The University's Research Park is located on land acquired by the University from the Department of the Interior in 1968.

ii. The patent transferring this land requires that the University use this land for University purposes consistent with the RPPA.

iii. Operation of the Research Park is a valid public purpose under the RPPA, according to assurances previously provided to the University by the Department of the Interior.

iv. In its 1968 original petition requesting transfer of the lands on which the University operates the Park, the University expressly stated its intent to use a portion of the land as a research park.

v. Importantly, our petition acknowledged that operation of a research park might present a novel use of land under RPPA.

vi. Consequently, we suggested that, if the Department of the Interior believed it more appropriate, the University could instead use its land grant entitlement to acquire this land.

vii. Nonetheless, the Department granted this land to the University under the RPPA, based on the University's description of its intended uses.

viii. In fact, by letter dated December 10, 1970, then Secretary of the Interior Fred J. Russell expressly confirmed that the University's operation of a research park on these lands is a "valid public purpose" under RPPA.

ix. Following 1970, and until very recently, the BLM has not objected to the University's operation of the research park citing restrictions in the RPPA.

x. In good faith reliance on Department of the Interior assurances, the University has invested significant institutional resources in the development of Research Park to ensure that it fulfills its mandate for public benefit.

xi. Research Park has become a successful innovation hub for Utah and is home to dozens of companies and many University departments, with a combined workforce totaling more than 14,000 employees.

xii. Research Park is home to BioFire, which was recently acquired by multi-national biotech company bioMérieux, as well as ARUP Laboratories, a leading national academic reference laboratory offering high-quality diagnostic testing and consulting services to hospitals and health systems across the nation.

xiii. Research Park was also the original home of Myriad Genetics, a leading genetic testing company that played a key role in the discovery and sequencing of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 breast cancer genes.

xiv. All of these companies are key players in a vibrant and growing life sciences economy in Utah.

xv. The University hopes to continue making significant investments in improvements to Research Park including, for example, adding a public transportation hub that is connected to the system across the Salt Lake Valley.

xvi. However, the BLM recently informed the University that the commercial, residential and transportation uses associated with research parks are typically problematic under the RPPA.

e. The University of Utah Research Park Act will settle, once and for all, the University's authority to operate the Research Park on University land that is subject to the RPPA.

i. The University understands questions the Department of the Interior might have regarding whether operation of a research park qualifies as a valid public purpose contemplated by the RPPA.

ii. The University acknowledged this much in its original petition for the grant, as demonstrated by the University's offer to receive the land pursuant to the University's land grant entitlements.

iii. However, this question was resolved long ago, as demonstrated by the written materials the University has submitted to this Committee.

iv. Nonetheless, in order to put this issue to rest, and to provide guidance to both the University and BLM, the University respectfully requests that this Committee vote in favor of the University of Utah Research Park Act.

v. It is critical to the University, the State of Utah and the Federal government that the University's Research Park continues to succeed.

vi. If the University is now prohibited from improving Research Park in ways that ensure its continued success, as has recently been suggested by the BLM, progress made to date will be undone, and significant public and private investments in the Park will be wasted.

vii. The University has been a good steward of this land for more than fifty years, and will continue to be a good steward for many years to come.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, President Randall. I will now recognize Members for 5 minutes. First the gentlelady from Utah, Ms. Maloy. The floor is yours.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you.

President Randall, sorry I walked in in the middle of your testimony. That was rude of me.

You and I have been working on this for a long time, and I just want to put a fine point on some of the things you said to make it clear to all of my colleagues what we are actually trying to do here.

So how long has the university held title to the land in question?

Dr. RANDALL. Since 1968.

Ms. MALOY. So for over 60 years, almost 60 years, the university has had title. We are just talking about a cloud on the title. And what we are—so we—you and I have talked to people before, and they keep referring to this as a land transfer. The land—

Dr. RANDALL. The land was transferred, essentially, many, many, many, many years ago.

Ms. MALOY. Decades ago.

Dr. RANDALL. Yes.

Ms. MALOY. And what does it look like right now?

Dr. RANDALL. It looks like a typical research park, with many buildings and startup companies. There is space on the land to expand.

Ms. MALOY. So I have spent a lot of my professional career working on Bureau of Land Management issues. I know what typical BLM land in Utah looks like. There is usually sagebrush involved, and a lot of open space. Does this in any way resemble, say, the west desert in Utah?

Dr. RANDALL. Yes, we don't have any sagebrush on this property. [Laughter.]

Dr. RANDALL. It is business buildings and some parking lots.

Ms. MALOY. Yes, I think the Bureau of Land Management would have a hard time writing a resource management plan for the Research Park at the University of Utah. It is—I don't think they could manage it. We are talking about this in terms that don't even make sense. There is no public purpose that would be served by the reversionary clause, in my opinion. You don't have to respond to that.

But how is the current legal ambiguity around Research Park's lease impact your project's funding opportunities and strategic planning?

Dr. RANDALL. Yes, we—currently, the cumbersome regulations basically leave the Research Park locked in time, unable to update to needs that are evolving.

Ms. MALOY. And I know you went into it just a little bit, but the research initiatives you are doing out there, how do they benefit the public?

Dr. RANDALL. Yes, if you look at the past, this is a park that will do a lot to advance human genetics. If you look at the companies that have come out of there recently, all of them are biotechnology-based. They have been hugely successful in kind of improving the human condition through genetic research.

Ms. MALOY. So if we were to put this on a scale, on one side we have possibly curing cancer or, you know, other genetic diseases and improving human lives. And on the other side we have maybe managing a piece of land in the middle of a developed downtown area for some multiple use that doesn't exist anymore, that hasn't for a really, really long time.

Dr. RANDALL. Yes, I think that is a nice way of putting it. I think we would lean into the development of future technologies on this land, and we need some relief from the cumbersome regulations that currently exist.

Ms. MALOY. So as far as—we are not talking about recreation here, but as far as public purposes go, it is a university, it is research, it is human health. It seems like a public purpose. How does ensuring the long-term stability and success of the Research Park benefit the State of Utah, besides just the university?

Dr. RANDALL. Well, I will say if you look at the economic benefit that comes out of the companies that are incubated there, it is tremendous. Even more, the human capital that is trained through these companies spawns more companies. And so you quickly get into a virtuous cycle, particularly in the area of biotechnology.

Ms. MALOY. Thank you.

I think I have made my point, Mr. Chairman. I am going to yield my time while I still have time left, which I never do. So thank you.

And thank you, Mr. President.

The rest of you got off easy because I am really focused on this one.

Dr. RANDALL. Thank you, Representative Maloy.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields, and I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Neguse, for questions.

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all the witnesses for your testimony on the bills that we are considering today.

In particular, I want to thank my fellow Coloradan, Mr. McCombs, for being here for traveling to Washington, D.C., and for your testimony and, of course, for your service to the State that we both love.

I wonder if you might—you have talked a bit about the partnerships between the State of Colorado and the Federal Government—the Forest Service, in particular, but BLM as well. And I suspect that you would agree with the sentiments—I don't know if you had an opportunity to hear some of the exchange that I had with the individual from the Forest Service previously, but some of the concerns that have been articulated on the ground in Colorado for the folks that I represent about the rollbacks at the Forest Service

and the realities with respect to the freezing of grants and just the implications for the folks back in Colorado.

I want to ask a particular question, though, about our public lands. As you may be aware, this Committee intends to participate in a markup of the Republican budget reconciliation plan. And while we have not yet seen the final legislative text, reports indicate that the Republicans, the House Republicans, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, intend to engage in a wholesale fire sale of our public lands to fund the reconciliation plan that they are pursuing.

In Colorado we see things very differently. We treasure the public lands that we are so lucky to have. I wonder if you might have a view on whether or not our public lands ought to be put up for sale. And insofar as you have a view on that, I am—would welcome it.

Mr. MCCOMBS. Thank you, Ranking Member Neguse.

You know, for you all's edification, prior to being a State forester in Colorado, I spent just over 13 years with U.S. Forest Service, primarily as an implementation-level line officer, so a district ranger. I was attracted to that work because I fundamentally believe that our public land, this experiment of holding not any lands but the best lands in trust together to the benefit of the many as opposed to the few, is by far the most beautiful demonstration of democracy in the history of the republic.

So that is how I feel about our public lands, and I feel like it is one of the few things that, hopefully as a people—certainly, as Coloradans, you know, our public lands define who we are in many respects. We—depending on where you live, you wake up every day with the mountains and the forests of our lands sort of coming in through your window. And I would hope that, if there is anything that we could come to an agreement on, it would be to continue to cherish, defend, protect, conserve, and manage those lands to the benefit of current generations and future generations to come.

Mr. NEGUSE. Yes. That is so well said, and it is hard for me to follow. That—I think you articulated so well the ethos that certainly you and I share and, frankly, I suspect the vast majority of Americans share.

And I would just say, as you noted, conservation, stewardship of our public lands has largely and long been a bipartisan value. It is only recently that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle seem to have abandoned that principle, and we are going to have an opportunity here in a week's time for my colleagues to, I hope, pull back from the brink and not allow the debasement and wholesale sale of our public lands continue under the plan that House Republicans have, at least thus far, seem to have articulated. Again, we will learn more here in the coming days.

But in any event, I appreciate you being here. I appreciate your testimony. I appreciate all the witnesses. Obviously, every one of these bills is a bipartisan bill, largely non-controversial, and I appreciate the sponsors bringing these bills forward and I am glad that our Committee, which has long been known as a—Subcommittee, I should say—that engages in the hard work of legislating, could be doing that today.

But I would just be remiss if I didn't address the elephant in the room, which is, as I described, some very, very disconcerting actions that the Trump administration is pursuing that will have generational impacts for our public lands for years to come.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the gentleman from Minnesota for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany. Thank you for convening this hearing today. And I want to thank the bills' sponsors for their hard work on these important pieces of common-sense legislation that would greatly benefit their respective districts and constituents.

I have the honor of representing a congressional district with vast Federal lands. And like my colleagues, my constituents face many of the same hurdles that theirs do when it comes to sensible policies that allow for productive use of public lands, whether they be Federal, State, local, or tribal.

Mr. Bray, can you expand on the impact on Representative Comer's bill and how a newly-renovated Boys and Girls Club without National Park Service restrictions can better serve the young people of Paducah and the community as a whole?

Mr. BRAY. Thank you, sir, for the question. I would be happy to.

So I myself have been involved with that club off and on, either as—on the board of directors, advisor, investor. So I am very knowledgeable of the club and the work that they do in Paducah. So that club really serves a part of the community who needs it the most. And as I said in my remarks, they have 200 and—I think I said 258 members. And on any given day they can only serve 120. So there is people—there is kids that go unserved.

What this bill will—

Mr. STAUBER. So—excuse me, Mr. Mayor—so you are turning young boys and girls away because it is not big enough?

Mr. BRAY. That is correct, sir.

So what this bill will allow the transfer of the land to the club itself, that will allow it to add on, build a gym, expand the club, and make it large enough to serve the population, the demand that we have for it, in Paducah.

We have a long list of investors lined up ready to invest. We have a \$1 million grant from the State of Kentucky and a long list of investors who want to invest in the club. It is one of the favorite charities, really, in our hometown. And once this transfer is complete, they will kick off a fundraising campaign, and it will be like no other. So there is a lot of pent up demand for this.

Mr. STAUBER. So the Boys and Girls Club in Paducah, if this bill passes, you are going to get monies from—did you say the State?

Mr. BRAY. Yes—

Mr. STAUBER. And—

Mr. BRAY. The State of Kentucky, has a—the Boys and Girls Club has a State organization as well, and they have provided us a grant. So the money is there, but we don't want to, until we get enough, it is probably going to take a \$4 or \$5 million investment, so—

Mr. STAUBER. But you are going to have private-sector investment, there are people waiting at the door to invest in this worthy project.

Mr. BRAY. Yes. We are. We are.

Mr. STAUBER. That is wonderful.

President Randall, if the Bureau of Land Management doesn't release the land that the Research Park is located on, what is the practical impact for the university? And is there an alternative?

Dr. RANDALL. You know, if we don't release it and certainly make it easier for development, productive development to go on, we essentially have an asset that becomes very, very unproductive both in terms of training students and in performing future research.

Mr. STAUBER. Can you expand upon those alternatives, though? What kind of additional costs or challenges might the university face?

Dr. RANDALL. Well, it would become difficult to attract the right talent. It would be difficult to upgrade facilities. Again, some of the things that we need to do now is upgrade transportation infrastructure, but also locate workforce housing for our graduate students and amenities for individuals that want to live in that research park so that it again becomes a thriving innovation district.

Mr. STAUBER. So it is safe to say that your students would be negatively impacted if this land is not released, is that safe to say?

Dr. RANDALL. Yes.

Mr. STAUBER. Again, thanks for your testimony and to the members who brought this common-sense legislation forward. I appreciate it.

And Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the gentlelady from New Mexico for questioning for 5 minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to also welcome all of our guests.

Thank you all so much for coming to testify today. We know you traveled a long way to get here. And I especially want to thank our State forester from Colorado for being here. I am the Congresswoman for central New Mexico, and I happen to think we have one of the best State foresters in the country, but Colorado's is pretty good, too. So we are glad you are there.

And I appreciate your support for the Post-Disaster Reforestation Act. And, you know, I was talking just a few moments ago about the impacts that these catastrophic fires we have been having in New Mexico have had on our communities, and I was struck in particular in your testimony that restoration of these landscapes isn't just a matter of ecological restoration for environmental reasons, but the human impacts that these catastrophic fires have.

And in particular, you mentioned water quality and debris flows. And in northern New Mexico we had huge fires up in the Mora County area, and we still have a water treatment plant that has not been able to reopen because of the impacts to the watershed. And in southern New Mexico, in my district, we had such massive debris flows that there were over 500 homes taken out by the debris flows post-fire. That wasn't even the fire itself.

But I also want to take a moment to welcome, we are joined here today by the new President and Vice President of Highlands University that has been at the forefront in New Mexico of reforestation in our State and, in fact, is working with our State forester to get a program similar to what this bill would support off the ground at a State level.

And one of the main arguments for our State-level legislation, which State Forester McCarthy helped to pass in New Mexico, is the economic benefits, especially in our rural communities. So I wonder, could you talk about what are the economic benefits of these reforestation projects, especially in rural communities?

Mr. MCCOMBS. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question.

And, you know, one of the economic benefits is workforce employment. In fact, I was at the breakfast this morning and ran into your 4-H leadership in New Mexico.

Ms. STANSBURY. All right.

Mr. MCCOMBS. And they gave me some chili seeds as I was recruiting them to come to Colorado State University and study forestry, and be part of the reforestation pipeline that myself and State Forester Laura McCarthy are deep partners in. We both went forward to the U.S. Forest Service for resources to round out the revitalization of our nursery capacity at our requisite States, and we continue to work towards building a community of practice, of actors deeply committed to a bias for action as it relates to reforestation.

You know, the example I would provide, economic benefits, I was touring the Grizzly Creek fire with the utilities director of Glenwood Springs in Colorado, who said 6 percent of the watershed burned, and they spent upwards to \$10 million just to get things operational, 6 percent. So if you think about the huge economic challenges that would face any community to rebuild their infrastructure in the wake of a wildfire, without the restoration benefits of immediate and aggressive reforestation efforts as part of our, hopefully, it will become instinctive, it is just what we do: as soon as wildfire hits, we assess, we prioritize, we galvanize the resources and the workforce, and we go to town.

But there is an enormous amount of opportunities for economic drivers, for rural communities to be part of this restoration workforce. And I see not only that as an outflow, but also research and seed source collection and planting. There is just a variety of great jobs, and there is just a burgeoning army of young people deeply committed to making things better and leaving things better than they found them.

Ms. STANSBURY. And I will say those are good-paying, long-term jobs, not just seasonal and temporary jobs.

And I also want to say thank you for your comments a moment ago about the cutbacks. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the mass firings, the funding freezes, the President's budget that is going to drop this week, and yes, the reconciliation package that is going to be marked up in this Committee next week are all looking at cutting those jobs, and cutting that economic development, and cutting the programs that actually support the resilience and fire preparedness of our communities. And in fact, we have just seen a slew of executive orders and secretarial orders that would

open more forests to more logging and more impacts and attacks on science.

And so I hope that my colleagues, in the spirit of bipartisanship that we see in this hearing, will speak up because we know our communities are at risk. And all of these cuts and all of these impacts will impact our communities.

And so I deeply appreciate the Chairman for holding this hearing and thank you, State Forester, for being here, and thank you all.

I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Dr. Kennedy for 5 minutes.

Dr. KENNEDY. Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honor to be here, and I thank the witnesses for being here. I love that we can potentially use this land more effectively in each of these considerations that we have, and particularly from Utah.

I am very proud to see President Randall here, somebody who has been a friend of mine for years, and actually even taught my brother in business school. I have been to medical school and law school, and actually the only reason I might have gone to business school is because President Randall might have taught me, but he went on to be a university president so I decided not to go to business school.

So, otherwise, though, I am very grateful, President Randall, for you to be here. You are bringing more than two decades of experience at the university, and served as a dean and an accounting professor in the David Eccles School of Business. And you have been dedicated to helping the school flourish for many years. I applaud you for that.

I have a few questions, President Randall, particularly with the Utah focus of your bill, and I am interested in the opportunities that come to students as a result of this land being used at Research Park in that capacity. Could you tell us more about how students benefit by Research Park, and what sort of research opportunities and business opportunities come to the students of University of Utah as a result of that land being used in this capacity?

Dr. RANDALL. You know, Research Park really becomes an interface for our research enterprise and the businesses that flow out of that research enterprise. And really, it becomes quite a porous membrane. And so you will get post-doctoral students, the University of Utah actually trains over 50 percent of the sophisticated STEM students in the State of Utah. They will often be engaged in discovery. And those businesses naturally fall out of their course of study, and we move them into the Research Park. And so to be able to develop a research park with robust incubators, with places for individuals to live, with new transportation modes so they can get to and from is really quite vital.

Dr. KENNEDY. Thanks for bringing that up. I do think for us to consider the students is an important part.

Let's go to the negative associated with this. If not only did we not pass this bill, H.R. 2876, but if we didn't pass it, and then on the whim of some future BLM director they were to entirely retract the authorizations for use that they have given to you over these

decades, what losses would we as not only the State of Utah, Salt Lake City, but also as a Nation, what potential losses might be in that more dystopian view of what we are proposing?

Dr. RANDALL. Yes, well, you lose at the current time, 14,000, potentially 14,000 jobs which are drawn elsewhere because the park has not been modernized. You lose the innovation and companies that come out of there all the time. One of the largest companies located in that Research Park is a reference lab of nearly \$1 billion in revenue and 4,000 to 5,000 employees in and of themselves that actually serves the hospitals across the country. It would be a massive loss. And I guess if you want to get that dystopian, just think about empty parking lots.

Dr. KENNEDY. Thank you for bringing that up.

We have been talking a lot lately in Washington, D.C. about bureaucratic red tape, and it is really interesting that all four of you have to come here to this Committee in this place from those locations that you represent and actually live in to actually ask about this land that you usually, on a day-to-day basis, experience. And it is a really interesting reflection on who should control the land, Washington D.C., or the locals who know and love the land and actually want to use it for the Boys and Girls Club, and watershed, and the opportunity to reforest and take good care of it.

I don't believe any of us around this dais or at the witness table or even those that are listening want to see, outside of our people, the most precious resource we have, our land, the opportunity to use our land, we don't want to see that land misused or abused.

So back to President Randall and the opportunities that we have to use this land more effectively. Tell me, if we were to resolve this issue, what would that do for you and your team to give you more time, potentially, to deal with the possibility that Washington, D.C. is going to take it from you, that you could actually invest in using that land in a more effective fashion?

Dr. RANDALL. Yes. As you know, investment dollars need certainty and a path over a time horizon to recover those investments. I think if we were able to clarify these uses in ways that would augment the investments that we want to make, you would see a biotech sector that would thrive there, you would see new technologies that would move quicker to market. And again, our focus of that research park is on improving the lives of human beings, much of those through genetic and healthcare-related improvements.

Dr. KENNEDY. Thank you very much, President Randall, and to the rest of you for your testimony.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you to the Vice Chairman. And now I am going to conclude our hearing by asking a few questions myself.

Mayor Mays, how long have you sought to get this designation to be able to get this change to get a special use permit?

Mr. MAYS. Well, we have a special use permit now, but we have been trying to acquire this property for probably 30 years.

Mr. TIFFANY. So it has been about 30 years that this has been going on?

Mr. MAYS. Yes. I want to emphasize, though, that the Forest Service has always been very cooperative with us. We have worked with them on other projects, and we have really enjoyed our relationships. But the red tape associated with acquiring property involves many State and Federal agencies, which makes it more difficult.

Mr. TIFFANY. Do you have this included in your comprehensive plan, this expansion?

Mr. MAYS. Yes, we do.

Mr. TIFFANY. How long have you had it in your comprehensive plan?

Mr. MAYS. Our comprehensive plan was just adopted by the city council about 6 months ago.

Mr. TIFFANY. OK. Mr. McCombs, I have it here in my documentation that there is an estimated 834 million dead standing trees in Colorado. Is that accurate?

Mr. MCCOMBS. Mr. Chair, I think it would be a reasonable estimation, but there is a significant amount of dead trees in Colorado.

Mr. TIFFANY. Largely due to insect outbreaks.

Mr. MCCOMBS. Correct.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is that right?

Mr. MCCOMBS. Correct.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. So what we are talking about here under this bill, do you have the capacity at the State to be helpful to the Federal Government?

Mr. MCCOMBS. One hundred percent, sir, and we are. The Good Neighbor Authority was invented in Colorado, and we have a deep and abiding commitment to this concept of shared stewardship, working well with the Federal Government regardless of agency to move Colorado forward as it relates to forest health, watershed health.

Mr. TIFFANY. How many mills do you have today versus 30 years ago in Colorado, sawmills, other types of wood-producing mills?

Mr. MCCOMBS. I would have to speculate to answer that question, but I can say that a significant decrease from a few years, or 30 years ago. Right now we have, I think, five mills in operation across the State.

Mr. TIFFANY. Would you say that that is one of the impediments we have at this point, is that as the capacity has went away in the Western States with the various mills, the wood-consuming mills, that that is a concern as we go forward?

Mr. MCCOMBS. Absolutely. You know, Colorado will never be a huge national driver of timber supply, but we are a stewardship State. We manage our forests to protect watershed health, forest health, and continue to underwrite all of the other benefits we get from having a huge forested landscape within the State.

And, you know, I talk about our mill capacity as a cost-per-acre reducer. And we have great relationships, in fact, a core component of my agency's mission is to ensure that that utilization capacity is maintained, and that we also explore all of the available emerging utilization capacities coming online like mass timber and biochar, biofuels, things like that.

Mr. TIFFANY. It was expressed earlier, this concern that there is going to be this massive de-logging effort that is going to go on under the Trump administration. Do you have fears that this is going to happen, that there will not be proper conservation used with the removal of timber on Federal forest lands?

Mr. MCCOMBS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, my experience is characterized by my relationships with our Federal partners, which are strong, and communication is open, and we have long found ourselves in a position where we have been able to move out together, where Colorado's values, as well as those land managers' values, come into alignment. And we move out at what I call the speed and intensity of the problem that we are facing.

As it relates to the incentives being placed from the President's executive orders, I think certainly, at least in Colorado, you know, we are not a production State, but we will always be a stewardship State, and we are called to manage our forests and to engage with them in ways that are rooted in science and lead to the outcomes that we know are critical.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is it conservation to not manage forests?

Mr. MCCOMBS. I would say we have a duty to act, sir, and that part of conservation is engaging with the landscape.

Mr. TIFFANY. Because what we heard earlier from one of my colleagues is that they are stoking the fear that we are going to start cutting more trees on our Federal forest lands, whether it be U.S. Forest Service lands or Bureau of Land Management lands, trying to stoke this fear that there is going to be far too many trees, and our forests are going to be denuded. And I think nothing could be further from the truth.

I mean, when you look at much of the West, there has been a lack of management, there has been a lack of trees come off. And when you have 834 million standing dead trees due to insect outbreaks, that is a problem. Correct?

Mr. MCCOMBS. It is a liability, correct.

Mr. TIFFANY. It is a huge liability. And this has gone on throughout the West.

So I would just say ignore the stoking of fears that are going on here. We need to have more wood managed. I have a million-and-a-half acres of Federal forest land up in my district in northern Wisconsin. And if there is anything it needs, is better management. It needs more trees cut. We have seen mills go away in that region also, and there is no reason why we can't be cutting timber here in the United States of America to make two-by-fours to build homes, rather than bringing it in from other countries because we have got plenty of wood. In the upper Great Lakes States we grow twice as much timber right now as we consume. We have got plenty, and we should be harvesting it, and we should be encouraging people to make long-term decisions to build those mills that can accept that wood here for the benefit of the American people. I am going to close with that.

I want to thank all of you for your testimony.

Oh, I do have one final question, Director McCombs. To the questions earlier that there is going to be this vast wholesale sale of Federal lands, do you think any of the three requests that are

being made here by the gentlemen at the dais with you should be denied?

Mr. MCCOMBS. Thank you, Chairman. No, like I said, as a ranger I did lots of land exchanges over the years across the country, and I think there are very reasonable situations whereby administrative parcels can be conveyed out of Federal ownership to the benefit of local community still held in trust, still held into the public's benefit.

But what I would hope is that if, as the Ranking Member had suggested earlier, that any wholesale transfer would be something that we wouldn't consider as a people. You know, we have an incredible history of this both preservation and conservation, working lands for working people, as well as maintaining the cathedral of beautiful lands in our parks and wildlife refuges, and that is something worth protecting, and that is something worth gifting to the generations to come.

Mr. TIFFANY. What is the definition of "wholesale sales"? How many acres? And what threshold do we make where it becomes, by definition, wholesale?

Mr. MCCOMBS. That is a fair question. I would think it is just, in my mind, it is, this age-old consideration, you know, who should be managing these lands on behalf of the people? And I think, so far, the idea of holding them in trust nationally has served us all well, and I would hope that we would perpetuate that in the future, while at the same time ensuring that Americans derive the benefits of those resources as were intended when the laws were passed that put them in trust.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, and that is one of the things we have seen. I know in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest up where I live, they have consistently complained now for 20 years that there is more and more resources going simply to fight fire rather than doing the work that could be done on their forest, and that has happened as a result of management. So it is important that we do that.

I went way over my time, but I really appreciate your indulgence. I want to thank all of you for your testimony and all of our Members for questions.

Members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for you. We will ask that you respond to those in writing.

Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Subcommittee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, May 2, 2025. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for your responses.

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

[Whereupon, at 12:07 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Statement for the Record

U.S. Department of the Interior

H.R. 528, H.R. 1276, and H.R. 2876

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member use, and members of the Subcommittee, the Department of the Interior is pleased to provide this statement for the record on the following legislation: H.R. 528, Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025; H.R. 1276, To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky; and H.R. 2876, University of Utah Research Park Act.

H.R. 528, Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act

H.R. 528 requires the Department of the Interior (Department), in coordination with states, local governments, and Tribes, to identify lands requiring reforestation and restoration following “unplanned disturbances” (e.g., natural disasters) that are unlikely to recover without intervention. The Department is further directed to propose a list of priority projects for reforestation and restoration for each fiscal year, which may be carried out through grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements. H.R. 528 requires annual reporting to Congress including an accounting of all covered lands requiring reforestation and restoration; priority projects; grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements supporting priority projects; and recommendations on any implementation gaps. The Department strongly supports the intent of the bill to address post-disaster reforestation and restoration and defers to the Forest Service on aspects of the bill that pertain to them.

In his first term, President Trump signed legislation providing the single largest investment in America’s national parks and public lands in history, as well as legislation to improve the funding process for the Forest Service and the Department’s wildfire suppression operations. President Trump’s actions improved national parks and public lands for the American people, while improving forest management and wildfire suppression to protect communities and natural resources—all while greatly benefiting our Nation’s economy.

Today, numerous, severe threats to American landscapes continue to escalate in size, frequency, and intensity. Uncharacteristic wildfire, insect infestations, diseases, drought, flooding, and invasive species endanger public lands and create a need for reforestation and restoration.

Wildfires alone destroy communities, infrastructure, and resources that are critical to the Nation’s security, prosperity, and well-being. They can cause complex problems, from severe loss of vegetation and soil erosion to a decrease in water quality and possible flash flooding. The Department’s approach to wildfire recovery is similar to the approach taken by the bill to address reforestation and restoration following natural disasters, and notes that many post-disaster reforestation efforts are currently addressed through existing forestry programs and forestry program funding.

The Department facilitates post-fire recovery through the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program. The BAER program determines the need for, prescribes, and implements post—fire emergency stabilization to protect public safety, minimize threats to property, and prevent further degradation of the landscape. BAER assessment plans and implementation are often a cooperative effort between federal agencies (Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Geological Survey), and state, Tribal and local forestry and emergency management departments.

In some cases, the Department may provide additional funding through the Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) program for up to five years after containment to repair or improve fire—damaged lands that are unlikely to naturally recover. The Department’s firefighting bureaus utilize BAR funds to support the recovery process and provide a “bridge” to long-term restoration. Allocation of BAR funds involves a rigorous and competitive process to evaluate projects to ensure the most critical areas receive treatment first.

The Department has successfully used BAER and BAR to support immediate and long-term reforestation and restoration needs and welcomes the opportunity to expand its capacity to address the impacts of other natural disasters on communities and natural resources. To maximize efficiency, the Department also recommends reducing the proposed reporting requirements of the bill.

Finally, the Department notes that the text of H.R. 528 passed the House of Representatives as part of H.R. 471, the Fix Our Forests Act, sponsored by House Natural Resources Chairman Westerman. We support these efforts and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee to improve forest and rangeland management and aid in efforts to protect homes and infrastructure from natural disaster.

H.R. 1276, To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky

H.R. 1276 directs the Secretary to undertake action to remove deed restrictions from a land parcel transferred to the City of Paducah, Kentucky through the National Park Service's Federal Lands to Parks program. Through this public-benefit conveyance program, the National Park Service partners with the U.S. General Services Administration to transfer surplus Federal real property to state and local governments for public parks and recreation use while saving taxpayer dollars by reducing the Federal inventory of unneeded Federal land and facilities. Removing these restrictions would allow the City to sell or repurpose the land for purposes other than public recreation. The Department looks forward to working with the bill sponsor on this legislation to meet the community's needs.

H.R. 2876, University of Utah Research Park Act

H.R. 2876, the University of Utah Research Park Act, confirms the use of certain federal lands for public purposes on a 593-acre parcel in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Department supports the bill's goal of providing certainty regarding the current and potential uses of the parcel, and we support removing the federal interest in the parcel.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regularly transfers public land to local governments and nonprofits for a variety of public purposes pursuant to the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act and other statutes. The R&PP Act, and other similar legislation directing such conveyances, generally require that the transferred lands must be used for the specific authorized public purposes or revert to the federal government.

In the 1930s, the U.S. Department of the Army decommissioned Fort Douglas near Salt Lake City, Utah, and transferred ownership of this property to the Department. On October 18, 1968, the BLM issued a R&PP patent to the University of Utah (University), numbered 43-99-0012, "for purposes of academic expansion of the University of Utah, in Salt Lake City Utah, for an arboretum, and for highway and utility rights-of-way to serve those purposes." Today, the lands identified in H.R. 2876—commonly referred to as "Research Park"—contain a complex of technology, education, and medical buildings, among other uses. Over the years, the University has approached the BLM to request additional uses on the property, which in some cases were for uses not allowed under the R&PP Act.

H.R. 2876, the University of Utah Research Park Act, would affirm that uses of the parcel by the University, as approved by the letter from the Secretary of the Interior to the University dated December 10, 1970, and any modifications of the approved plan of development and management approved by the Department prior to the date of enactment of this Act, are valid public purposes consistent with the requirements of the R&PP Act. Additionally, the bill provides that other uses of the parcel by the University that are consistent with use as a University research park and related university purposes, including development of student housing and a transit hub, are valid public purposes consistent with the R&PP Act.

The Department supports the bill's goal to facilitate development and use of the parcel by the University. Previous legislative efforts to address the development and use of this parcel have sought to release the reversionary interest held by the United States. The Department notes that the sponsor may consider a similar approach in this bill to permanently remove the federal interest in the parcel and achieve the sponsor's objective, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue further.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this Statement for the Record.

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Pettersen

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRITTANY PETERSEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO

House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands
“Legislative Hearing on H.R. 528, H.R. 655, H.R. 1276 & H.R. 2876”

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding H.R. 528, the *Post Disaster Restoration and Reforestation Act*.

More than 3 million people in Colorado—over half the state’s population—live in areas where there is a moderate to high risk of wildfires.¹ Since 2001, 20 of the largest wildfires in America have occurred in Colorado and more than 2,500 Colorado families have lost their homes.² Wildfires have not only threatened the safety and well-being of our families, they have also damaged ecosystems, and disrupted our communities. From 2013 to 2023, there were an average of 61,407 wildfires annually and an average of 7.2 million acres impacted annually.³ This is our new normal: fires are burning more frequently and more fiercely than ever before.

As climate change worsens, we must take a whole-of-government approach to respond to these crises and protect our communities from the destruction. This includes investing in pre-disaster mitigation measures such as strengthening infrastructure and housing in the wildland-urban interface, enhancing early detection capabilities, supporting our country’s wildland firefighting workforce, and focusing on post-disaster resilience.

Unfortunately, as climate change accelerates, these devastating events happen more frequently, compounding their effects and challenging our country’s natural disaster response as landscapes and communities attempt to recover. For example, in states like Colorado where we combat wildfires, we also contend with the compounding effect of post-fire flooding. Wildfires leave lasting scars on our landscapes and can permanently alter our environment. This heightens the risk of deadly flash flooding and mudflows. When a fire kills and burns trees, understory, and other organic matter within a forest, the high temperatures convert these materials into a compound that repels water.⁴ The next time it rains, these burned areas can’t absorb the precipitation; the water runs off the landscape rapidly, and the risk of damaging flash floods grows. Even long after a fire has reached 100% containment, communities downstream and downhill from burned areas are in danger of potentially deadly flash floods and debris flows.

Because of increasingly frequent, repetitive, and damaging natural disasters in our forested areas, our federal government, in conjunction with state, local, and Tribal stakeholders, must prioritize identifying and investing in comprehensive recovery efforts.

H.R. 528, the *Post Disaster Restoration and Reforestation Act*, will require the Department of Interior, in coordination with states, local governments, Tribes, and colleges, to identify lands in need of reforestation and restoration due to natural disasters and it will help support projects in those areas. These kinds of crucial investments will help ensure communities impacted by wildfire can rebuild and recover in a way that improves their resilience against future natural disasters.

Recovery after a wildfire is a lengthy and challenging process. However, H.R. 528 will help build stronger, more resilient communities that can stand up against the threat of wildfires for generations to come. I appreciate the Committee’s consideration of this urgent legislation and look forward to their efforts to address this critical issue.

¹ https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs_series/rmrs/gtr/rmrs_gtr438/rmrs_gtr438_chap09.pdf

² <https://dfpc.colorado.gov/sections/wildfire-information-center/historical-wildfire-information>

³ <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homesecc/IF10732.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.weather.gov/sew/burnscar>

National Association of Counties

April 25, 2025

Hon. Thomas Tiffany, Chairman
 Hon. Joe Neguse, Ranking Member
 House Natural Resources Committee
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Re: In Support of the “Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025”
 Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Dear Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), the only national organization representing the nation’s 3,069 county governments, we appreciate the opportunity to submit comments for the record in support of the Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025. This legislation makes significant advancements toward restoring our nation’s landscapes in the wake of natural disasters that align with county priorities to strengthen cooperation between federal, state, tribal and local governments.

ABOUT AMERICA’S COUNTIES

Counties are foundational to the American system of government. We deliver essential services such as infrastructure development and maintenance, emergency response, environmental stewardship, land use planning and economic development. These responsibilities position counties as key partners for effective land restoration efforts. As the frontline implementers of federal policy, we bring local knowledge and expertise to the table.

RESTORATION OF DAMAGED LANDSCAPES

The *Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025*, introduced by Congresswoman Brittany Pettersen and Congressman Chuck Edwards, includes several elements that we strongly support:

- The Act requires the identification of damaged landscapes that without intervention would remain scarred. Effective planning and coordination will lead to targeted investments in places where funds will have the greatest impact toward bringing back natural order.
- The Act effectively incorporates the place-based knowledge we provide by requiring outreach to local governments and allowing shared stewardship agreements to be created. As local experts, our involvement will ensure these restoration projects meet local needs and maximize project efficiency.
- NACo also supports the broader Fix Our Forests Act, which includes the Post—Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025 as a key provision. Together, these bills recognize the vital role counties play in forest management, disaster recovery and long-term landscape restoration. By emphasizing shared stewardship agreements and requiring outreach to local governments, the legislation ensures that the place-based knowledge and expertise of county leaders inform restoration priorities and project design.

DISASTER IMPACTS ON COUNTIES

We, as local governments, are on the front lines of preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters. Post-disaster recovery and restoration efforts are critical to responsible land management and preparedness for future disasters. Lands heavily damaged by wildfires, insects, hurricanes and other disasters in turn often become more vulnerable to prolonged damage from soil erosion and mudslides. We encourage the development of cooperative forest management and landscape restoration strategies to not only redevelop our landscapes, but to repair damages caused to our communities.

This bill effectively addresses key county concerns and obstacles when attempting to recover from unplanned disasters. Through collaborative efforts to identify need and implement restoration strategies, we will be better positioned to redevelop our communities and prepare for future disasters.

LOOKING AHEAD

We appreciate the subcommittee’s leadership in advancing this important legislation. NACo fully supports the Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of

2025 and will continue working with Congress to ensure effective implementation of cooperative restoration and recovery efforts.

Thank you for your consideration. We welcome continued opportunities to provide the county perspective on this topic. Please direct any follow-up questions to Zeke Lee, NACo's legislative director for public lands, at zlee@naco.org

Sincerely,

MATTHEW D. CHASE,
CEO and Executive Director

