



**COW CREEK BAND OF UMPQUA TRIBE OF INDIANS**  
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**Responses to Questions for the Record**  
**Tim Vredenburg, Director of Forest Management**  
**Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians**  
**Hearing on the Discussion Draft of H.R. \_\_, the FORESTS Act**  
**Subcommittee on Federal Lands**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**May 20, 2025**

**Question 1:**

In your testimony, you discussed the difficulty of obtaining necessary NEPA approvals to conduct wildfire prevention activities. You previously testified before the Senate in support of the Fix Our Forests Act and the Cow Creek Tribe has proposed several ideas to improve that legislation, including ways to streamline NEPA. What are some improvements the Cow Creek Tribe supports to FOFA that would streamline NEPA?

**Response:**

The Fix Our Forests Act creates vital tools necessary to address wildfire risks threatening federal forest lands but does not effectively extend those tools to Indian Country. The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians supports several targeted improvements to the Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA) that would help streamline the NEPA process and better protect Tribal lands, while maintaining environmental safeguards. These include:

Tribes with Reservation forests lack a tax base to fund government operations and instead rely heavily on timber trust revenues to provide essential governmental services to their members, and to responsibly manage their lands and other resources. Therefore, allowing Tribes to retain timber trust revenue will allow for better forest and wildfire management across Tribal, State and Federal lands.

There is an extreme wildfire risk facing Indian Country forests, both from forest conditions on Tribal trust lands, and from adjacent federal and state forest lands. This wildfire risk threatens critical trust revenues needed by Tribes to serve their members.

There are millions of forested acres across Indian Country, meaning any solution to our national wildfire crisis must meaningfully include Tribes and Indian Country forests.

**Summary of Proposed Amendments:**

1. Elevate the reduction of wildfire risk to timber held in trust by the United States on behalf of Tribes to the same levels as the reduction of wildfire risks to communities, infrastructure, and municipal watersheds.
2. Empower Tribes to designate firesheds on their own lands, and adjacent lands where Tribes are carrying out projects under the Tribal Forest Protection Act.
3. Ensure that federal agencies will consult Tribes on a government-to-government basis when conducting fireshed assessments that include or threaten Indian forest land or rangeland.
4. Include Tribes in the authorization for use of emergency environmental consultation procedures to conduct emergency fireshed management projects in and adjacent to Indian Country.

5. Establish National Environmental Policy Act categorical exclusions for fire-shed management projects in and adjacent to Indian Country that mirror categorical exclusions that exist for federal lands outside Indian Country under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
6. Receipts Retention under Good Neighbor Authority: An important and complementary provision in FOFA is the technical fix to the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) that would allow Tribes to retain and reinvest receipts from forest restoration projects. This change would help fund ongoing and future work and support the development of sustained Tribal forestry programs.

## Question 2:

Could you explain how the Fix Our Forests Act is complementary to the authorities provided in the FORESTS Act?

## Response:

The Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA) and the FORESTS Act offer mutually reinforcing solutions to the wildfire and forest health crisis—FOFA enhances efficiency and process reform, while the FORESTS Act strengthens Tribal leadership and access to federal tools.

- FOFA addresses procedural barriers by streamlining NEPA, ESA compliance, and other regulatory bottlenecks. It enables timelier implementation of critical restoration and fuels reduction work across priority landscapes. However, this authority needs to be expanded to Indian forest lands and treated as an equal to federal lands.
- The FORESTS Act expands Tribal access and authority, enhancing the use of the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA), enabling direct use of Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), and recognizing the value of Indigenous knowledge and cultural burning in federal forest stewardship.

Together, these bills work in concert:

1. A Tribal-led project under the FORESTS Act—such as through TFPA or GNA—could proceed more efficiently with the NEPA and ESA streamlining tools in FOFA.
2. The FORESTS Act expands the nation's capacity to address the National Wildfire Crisis that FOFA addresses. Creating the nexus for Tribes to assist the federal agencies will significantly add to the overall capacity necessary to achieve success at the appropriate scope and scale.
3. FOFA's provision allowing Tribes to retain GNA project receipts would make these projects more sustainable and scalable over time. The FORESTS Act creates the ability for Tribes to enter into revenue sharing agreements with local governments. This provision is essential for long-term community health, forest health and wildfire management.
4. FOFA's reforms also improve implementation of FORESTS Act goals by reducing delays that disproportionately affect smaller, under-resourced Tribal forestry programs.

In addition, Cow Creek recommends that the FIRESHED Assessment process established in the FORESTS Act explicitly prioritize Tribal co-management projects, Tribal trust lands, and federal lands adjacent to reservations or culturally significant landscapes. These areas often face high wildfire risk and have urgent restoration needs but are historically underprioritized in federal resource allocations.

In short, FOFA provides for regulatory certainty and agility, while the FORESTS Act provides governance authority—together they empower Tribes to lead in wildfire mitigation and forest restoration at the pace and scale the crisis demands.