

Judge Larry Blackmon
Testimony
House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
June 10, 2025

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I appreciate the chance to speak in support of my Congressman, Rep. French Hill's legislation, H.R. 3187, To require the Secretary of Agriculture to convey a parcel of property of the Forest Service to Perry County, Arkansas, and for other purposes.

Perry County is a small, rural county located in central Arkansas, with approximately 10,000 residents. Perry County is the fourth smallest county in Arkansas and the third-smallest by total land area. Roughly 16 percent of residents in Perry County live in poverty. The county is 77 percent forested, resulting in limited economic opportunities. As a result, we have a limited budget to invest in our community, which means we must find ways to maximize the value of every dollar.

For years, Perry County has sought to purchase the U.S. Forest Service property located at 1069 Fourche Avenue in Perryville, Arkansas. Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful in this effort. As mentioned earlier, Perry County has limited resources and a high poverty rate, and the small county has been unable to purchase it outright. Trying to purchase the U.S. Forest Service building has been a lengthy process. After Perry County requested an appraisal, the U.S. Forest Service took over a year to complete the assessment of the building. During that year's timeframe, the U.S. Forest Service had a new roof installed. Unfortunately, the roof soon began leaking due to faulty installation of the new roof by a contractor. Once Perry County received the appraisal value, we could no longer afford to purchase the U.S. Forest Service building and make the necessary repairs to make it usable.

The necessary improvements for the U.S. Forest Service Building include installing a new roof and repairing all the exterior wood facing that has been damaged by the leaking roof. The water damage from the leaking roof includes ceiling damage on the interior of the building, repairs to the trusses, and most of the flooring will need to be replaced. While the U.S. Forest Service building will require repairs and updates, our county does have the funding to make the necessary substantial repairs from the water damage. However, Perry County cannot make these improvements in addition to purchasing the U.S. Forest Service building outright.

Once Perry County restores the U.S. Forest Service building, it will support key programs. Specifically, the building will house local organizations currently struggling with limited space and inadequate resources, which restrain them from serving the community

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effectively. If Perry County is able to acquire the U.S. Forest Service building, we can move the county Extension Office, Conservation Office, and 4H into the building. Currently, none of these organizations has sufficient space to conduct the necessary activities to fully serve the people of Perry County. In addition, these organizations do not have access to meeting rooms or kitchen facilities for cooking classes, including classes about healthy eating habits. One of the most significant benefits to Perry County is that 4H would have a permanent home. Currently, 4H is forced to meet wherever they can find a suitable location.

Local support for Perry County acquiring this building is strong, which includes, but is not limited to, the City of Perryville, Perryville Mayor John Roland, the Perry County Chamber of Commerce, the Perry County Fair Association, State Representative Mary Bentley, and State Senator Terry Rice.

In conclusion, H.R. 3187 will help Perry County and create lasting benefits for our community. H.R. 3187 will enable numerous organizations to serve Perry County in a greater capacity than they currently can due to a lack of office space, meeting rooms, and storage areas for equipment needed to assist the citizens of Perry County.

Chairman Tiffany, that concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Larry Blackmon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Larry" and last name "Blackmon" clearly distinguishable.

Larry Blackmon
Perry County Judge