



H.R. 3922: (Rep. Neguse), “Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act”

Congressional Testimony, Colorado State Forester Matthew M. McCombs, January 14, 2026

Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Matthew McCombs, and I serve as the Colorado State Forester and Director of the Colorado State Forest Service. I appreciate the opportunity to be here, and I want to begin by thanking Congressman Joe Neguse for his leadership in reintroducing the Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act. This legislation reflects the reality of how wildfire actually behaves on the ground and represents a meaningful step forward in how our nation prepares for, responds to, and ultimately learns to live alongside wildfire.

In Colorado, wildfire has always been part of our landscape and our ecology. Fire plays an important role in sustaining healthy and productive forests and grasslands. But what we are experiencing today is fundamentally different in scale, intensity, and consequences. A warming climate, prolonged drought, accumulated fuels, and expanding development in fire-prone areas have dramatically increased both the likelihood and the negative impacts of wildfire.

The 2020 fire season was a turning point for Colorado. The Cameron Peak Fire became the largest wildfire in state history, burning more than 200,000 acres across federal, state, and private lands. Beyond the immediate fire impacts, the long-term consequences are still unfolding. That fire burned in critical watersheds that supply drinking water to many Colorado communities, increasing risks of flooding, sedimentation, and long-term water treatment costs that will be borne for decades.

That same year, the East Troublesome Fire demonstrated just how quickly wildfire can overwhelm our traditional planning and response. In a single day, the fire crossed the Continental Divide—something many of us previously thought unlikely—threatening the town of Estes Park and Rocky Mountain National Park. It moved seamlessly across ownership boundaries, underscoring that fragmented land management leads to fragmented outcomes when fire occurs.

More recently, the Marshall Fire reinforced an even more sobering reality: wildfire is no longer confined to remote or forested landscapes. In December of 2021, extreme winds



drove a grass-fed fire through suburban communities along the Front Range, destroying more than 1,000 homes in a matter of hours. Many of the affected residents did not consider wildfire to be a risk to their homes. That event exposed significant gaps in risk assessment, coordination, and preparedness—particularly in the wildland-urban interface—gaps that this legislation directly seeks to address.

The Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act reflects what those of us working in fire and forest management see every year: wildfire risk does not respect ownership boundaries, jurisdictional lines, or administrative authorities. Fires move across federal, state, Tribal, and private lands based on weather, fuels, and topography—not land ownership.

In Colorado, our most successful fuel reduction and forest health projects are those that are planned and implemented across entire landscapes. When federal agencies, states, Tribes, local governments, utilities, and private landowners are aligned around shared priorities, we see measurable reductions in risk, improved firefighter safety, and better protection of communities, watersheds, and infrastructure. Conversely, when projects stop at property lines, we leave gaps that fire inevitably exploits.

From a state perspective, this bill aligns squarely with what we know works. It emphasizes proactive risk reduction rather than reactive disaster response. It reinforces shared responsibility across levels of government and land ownership. And it supports coordinated, science-driven action that allows partners to move faster and more effectively before the next fire starts.

Importantly, this approach also makes fiscal sense. Every dollar invested in mitigation and cross-boundary planning reduces future suppression costs, disaster recovery expenditures, and long-term impacts to water supplies, infrastructure, and local economies. States like Colorado are ready to be strong partners in this work, but we need federal resources that match the scale and complexity of the challenge we face.

I also want to emphasize that other states are experiencing the same challenges we are facing in Colorado. Many of our neighbors could share similar stories of recent wildfires and their impacts, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of my fellow state foresters. United through the National Association of State Foresters, we share a common goal to conserve and protect America's forests and reduce fire risk on all lands, across public and private boundaries alongside our federal partners.



I am grateful to Congressman Neguse and this Committee for prioritizing solutions that reflect the realities on the ground and strengthen our collective ability to live alongside wildfire. I am also grateful to the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission for drafting the report whose recommendations underpin this legislation, and to my colleagues in Colorado, including Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Executive Director Dan Gibbs, Colorado Division of Fire Protection and Control Director Mike Morgan, Denver Water's Madelene McDonald, former Under Secretary and State Forester Jim Hubbard and Scott Miller of the Wilderness Society—for serving on the commission. This legislation represents a forward-thinking, actionable approach to improving our national wildfire resilience—one that recognizes wildfire as a shared risk requiring shared solutions.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.