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**Written Testimony of Wyatt Frampton,  
Acting State Forester, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
to the House Natural Resource Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 8682, the *Accelerating Forest Management Act***

The State of Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation is pleased to offer written testimony to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands for this legislative hearing on H.R. 8682, the *Accelerating Forest Management Act*. Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I also want to thank the bill sponsor, Congressman Troy Downing, who is a strong advocate for natural resource management in Montana's second congressional district.

My name is Wyatt Frampton, and I am honored to serve as the Acting State Forester for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. I have broad responsibilities for forest management across Montana. I lead the Department's forestry and fire portfolio, overseeing state trust timberlands, wildfire protection across more than 64 million acres of state, private, and federal lands, and delivery of forestry assistance programs across the state. I am responsible for implementing the Montana Forest Action Plan, coordinating with federal and local partners under authorities like the Good Neighbor Authority, and serving as the state's chief policy voice on forest health, wildfire resilience, and sustainable forest management.

Montana has built a proven track record of on-the-ground federal land management through years of cross-boundary stewardship with the U.S. Forest Service. In June 2025, Governor Greg Gianforte and Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz signed a landmark 20-year Shared Stewardship Agreement, setting a new national standard for collaborative forest restoration. Earlier this year, DNRC and the Forest Service identified two priority landscapes totaling more than 400,000 acres across the Flathead, Kootenai, and Bitterroot National Forests, translating that agreement into real, landscape-scale action. This historic agreement was made possible by the innovative leadership of Secretary Brooke Rollins, Governor Gianforte, and Chief Schultz, who have shown what is possible when state and federal agencies work together. These described projects also represent the scale and scope of actual work our forests need to meaningfully reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health in Montana.

That depth of experience navigating Good Neighbor Authority, aligning state and federal planning processes, and delivering treatments at scale is exactly what we intend to bring to our partnership with the Bureau of Land Management. The expanded categorical exclusions in the *Accelerating Forest Management Act* will add another tool to increase the pace and scale of work. While



BLM's forested footprint in Montana is smaller than that of the national forests, BLM ownership is still a meaningful and strategically important piece of the landscape-level puzzle. We are eager to expand our Good Neighbor Authority work with BLM, and categorical exclusions are an area where we have found real efficiencies in moving well designed projects forward and bring additional volume to market. Our state Forest Action Plan identifies over 82,000 acres of high-priority BLM land within 3.8 million acres needing urgent treatment. We share fire risk, watersheds, and the consequences of inaction.

Montana is ready to apply the lessons of our Forest Service partnership to build that same model of coordinated, accountable stewardship with BLM.

Over the last decade, Montana has experienced prolonged drought, widespread insect and disease outbreaks, and increasingly severe wildfire seasons, as documented consistently in annual forest health assessments by both DNRC and the U.S. Forest Service. During that same period, we have watched stands die and deteriorate while federal project timelines have stretched from months into years. That timber represents real economic value to rural counties, habitat to wildlife, and it represents real wildfire fuel for future fire seasons. Despite the conditions we face, many well designed timber projects have been slowed or stalled by litigation, which makes it harder to treat acres we know require management.

Salvage is a distinct category of decision-making. When a stand has been killed or severely damaged by fire, insects, disease, or drought, the question of whether to harvest those trees involves a fundamentally different environmental calculus than a decision about harvesting healthy, living timber. The timeline within which action is meaningful is also different. Once timber is dead, the clock starts. Dead timber does not wait for lengthy environmental assessments; it deteriorates, loses commercial value, and becomes ladder fuel for the next fire season.

The current 250 acre categorical exclusion threshold for BLM salvage is not adequate for the scale of disturbances we now see regularly across the West. A single fire in Montana can kill tens of thousands of acres of BLM-managed timber. Requiring a full environmental assessment for every salvage project above 250 acres means conducting National Environmental Policy Act review for decisions that are often less consequential, in terms of ecological outcome, than the disturbance event that preceded them. The time and resources required to complete that level of review can mean that, by the time a decision is signed, the economically viable window for harvesting the timber has closed, leaving field offices with the choice of spending federal funds to remove material that no longer has value or leaving it to rot in place.

H.R. 8682 addresses this problem while maintaining substantive environmental safeguards. Before invoking this categorical exclusion, BLM must document how snag and downed wood retention, erosion control, soil compaction, invasive species spread, riparian buffers, and temporary road decommissioning will be addressed. These are the same considerations Montana foresters apply on our own state trust lands when we conduct post-disturbance salvage operations. We have been doing this work for years, and experienced foresters can evaluate these factors efficiently and responsibly using professional judgment and established design standards.



Section 2 of H.R. 8682, which extends the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund through 2033, also deserves emphasis. The Fund allows BLM field offices to reinvest salvage timber receipts into follow-on restoration work, including seeding, planting, road decommissioning, and fuels reduction. When the Fund authority lapses, field offices lose the ability to plan and sequence the restoration work that turns a salvage project into a genuine recovery project. Extending the Fund through 2033 provides the planning certainty they need to complete the full post-disturbance cycle; not just the harvest.

The administrative history is instructive. The BLM salvage categorical exclusion finalized in 2020 was being used responsibly. Its rescission in 2024 left a significant gap in BLM's toolkit during one of the most active fire years Montana has seen in recent memory. BLM's April 6, 2026, proposed rulemaking begins to restore that capacity, but administrative tools can change. Codifying this categorical exclusion puts Congress on record that post-disturbance salvage on BLM lands, conducted within defined acreage limits and with documented environmental protections, does not require full NEPA review. That judgment reflects decades of practical experience on the ground.

Forest managers need clear, stable, and predictable tools that they can master and apply consistently across the landscapes they are responsible for. By codifying this categorical exclusion, Congress can ensure that these professionals are equipped with durable authorities that are not subject to shifting political winds, but grounded in sound management practice. That certainty will allow them to act more efficiently, more confidently, and more effectively in safeguarding the health and resilience of our forests.

Montana is ready to be a strong partner in implementation and is prepared to work hand in hand with our federal partners to expand acres treated and reduce wildfire risk on the landscape.

On behalf of the State of Montana, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today and provide testimony on H.R. 8682. I appreciate your consideration of this legislation and welcome your questions.

