

TESTIMONY OF BRETT STOREY
IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 184
“THE ACTION VERSUS NO ACTION ACT”
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS
HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON PENDING LEGISLATION

May 21, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to discuss H.R. 184, a bill to reform the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by limiting the scope of environmental assessments and impacting how agencies evaluate alternatives. I would also like to thank the sponsor of H.R. 184, Representative Tom McClintock.

My name is Brett Storey, I work for West Yost in support of the Placer County Water Agency, located in Northern California, and I also volunteer my time for the Star Valley Conservation District located in western Wyoming. I have dedicated the past twenty years to implementing watershed and forest restoration projects that actively manage our forests and protect the communities, wildlife, and adjacent lands that depend on them.

West Yost, a water resource management and engineering firm specializing exclusively in water, has been serving public agencies managing water supplies since 1990. I am presenting this testimony before the subcommittee solely in my capacity as a private citizen and not on behalf of, or as a representative of, West Yost.

I have personally conducted this work across five national forests in California and Wyoming. H.R. 184 offers a practical, common-sense framework for expanding the implementation of similar projects at a broader scale. We are experiencing a significant resurgence in collaborative partnership projects, an effort initiated under former Chiefs Christiansen and Moore, that has meaningfully increased stakeholder influence over how these projects are planned and executed.

This effort is bolstered by Chief Schultz's consistent emphasis on strengthening state-federal partnerships, Good Neighbor Authority, Shared Stewardship agreements, and accelerating the pace and scale of collaborative restoration as central pillars of his leadership.

Utilizing a Master Stewardship Agreement, I helped plan and implement the French Meadows Project in California's central Sierra in the watershed above a major municipal water supply reservoir and hydroelectric power system. The French Meadows Project is a multi-partner effort that includes Placer County Water Agency, the County of Placer, the U.S. Forest Service-Tahoe

National Forest, The Nature Conservancy, the American River Conservancy, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and the University of California.

The NEPA planning process is crucial in ensuring projects like French Meadows can proceed to implementation expeditiously and with as few impediments as possible. One of the factors contributing to the success of the French Meadows Project was the modeling and analysis of the preferred alternative versus the no-action scenario in our NEPA document. The initial results indicated stark differences in fire risk and spread between the two alternatives but also revealed potential impacts to special status species and water quality. The initial results allowed the partnership to enable further discussions with interested stakeholders to understand the dramatic benefits of the proposed project, but also helped us design forest treatments for a final project that avoided impacts. While the partners completed NEPA as a partnership and accomplished it in approximately half the time and half the costs of traditional USFS work, there is always room for further improvement.

It was the analysis of the action vs no action that showed the true value of the project. In the end, we were able to protect the water and power infrastructure, wildlife habitat, and eventually assisted in stopping another wildfire years later as the fire intensity was reduced and allowed firefighting crews to protect the landscape around a very important watershed.

The taxpayers of California have spoken clearly by passing bonds to fund projects for increasingly more expensive forest operations. Wyoming, by contrast, is just beginning to allocate state resources towards forest management projects, and the state Foresters' office has been instrumental in extending the reach of USFS projects by putting those state funds to use on critical landscapes including NF lands. In either case, efficient planning can be instrumental in getting more on-the-groundwork accomplished. By streamlining the NEPA process, the District Rangers and professional staff at the USFS will be better able to focus their work on the action alternative that they have designed evaluated against a no-action alternative that is often detrimental to the multiple use directives that guide forest policies..

In California and Wyoming, we are trying to protect the values of National Forest system lands, communities and their residents, water and power infrastructure, specific species like the Spotted Owl and American Goshawk, and migration corridors for elk, moose, and deer. Often this means using active forest management practices to reduce wildfire intensity in specific landscapes that are most important for maintaining and enhancing specific values. For important habitats in these states, active forest management projects are focused on areas that have not yet burned at high intensity, thereby protecting species and their habitat for the long term. HR 184 will allow for more efficient environmental planning that can protect the forest and nearby communities by implementing forest management activities sooner. This can be done by reducing the alternatives analysis to two, without sacrificing the robust environmental assessment of the action and no action alternatives.

Increasing the pace and scale of forest management on federal lands has many beneficial follow-on effects. For instance, communities that border federal lands may enjoy enhanced fire resiliency and lead to better availability and affordability of home insurance. Insurance companies make decisions in part by probabilities and evidence of protection. This bill will

allow the process of implementing forest management projects to be streamlined and get more projects accomplished while showing that preventive actions are happening with greater effectiveness.

In closing, I would like to reference a landmark UC Davis study that was published this month in the journal *Science* that analyzed nearly 300 wildfires in the western United States and found that every dollar spent on forest fuel treatments, such as thinning and prescribed burns, saves approximately \$3.75 in wildfire damages.

This is the first large-scale study to evaluate the economic value of Forest Service fuel treatments using data from actual wildfires that encountered treated areas, rather than relying solely on wildfire simulation models.

The question before this Committee is not whether we can afford to act, but whether we can afford the cost of continued inaction.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.