Testimony of Ea'mon O'Toole
Member, Board of Directors
Family Farm Alliance
And
Owner
Ladder Livestock Company
Savery, Wyoming

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Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries

Hearing Fix Our Forests for Affordable and Reliable Water and Power Supplies
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Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle, and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) on the topic of **Fixing Our Forests for Affordable and Reliable Water and Power Supplies.** My name is Ea'mon O'Toole and I am a Member of the Board of Directors for the Family Farm Alliance and a sixth-generation rancher at Ladder Ranch in the Little Snake River Valley in Wyoming.

Western forests are deteriorating and burning at an accelerating rate, and meaningful action is needed at the pace and scale of the problem. As we prepared this testimony, a troubling reality became clear: nearly every Alliance member could testify firsthand about the impacts of poor forest health, wildfire damage to infrastructure, or decades of post-fire consequences. Even worse, many of them are seeing the consequences of wildfire and its aftermath as I sit here today.

This hearing, along with bipartisan support for the *Fix our Forests Act* in both the House and Senate, shows encouraging high-level political attention to the critical need of getting ahead of the fire crisis through active management of our watersheds. It is time for Congress to ensure the faithful enactment of existing law, including the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, and enact legislation that transcends shifts in political leadership and protects Western forests before we lose them. Congress must ensure that we manage federal lands for multiple uses—specifically outdoor recreation, range (grazing), timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish—while ensuring

sustained yield, meaning these resources are managed so they can be used over the long term without being depleted, without focusing on single use preservation.

Family Farm Alliance and the Importance of Healthy Watersheds

The Family Farm Alliance is a grassroots organization of family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts, and allied industries in 16 Western states. We are committed to the fundamental proposition that Western irrigated agriculture must be preserved and protected for a host of economic, sociological, environmental and national security reasons – many of which are often overlooked in the context of other national policy decisions. The American food consumer nationwide has access to fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and beef throughout the year largely because of Western irrigated agriculture and the projects that provide water to these farmers and ranchers.

Western irrigated agriculture depends on healthy forests in the upper watersheds to provide adequate amounts of clean water to our rivers and reservoirs. Unfortunately, degraded forest conditions and severe wildfires continue to damage these watersheds, making water supplies increasingly uncertain

Impacts of Deteriorating and Dying Forests

Nearly 90 percent of people served by public water systems in the Western United States rely on federal forestlands for at least a portion of their water supply. In many cases, setting aside federal forest reserves was done for the explicit purpose of protecting our headwaters and local watersheds. Decades of flawed forest management, constrained budgets, and litigation—combined with drought and climate change—have turned many of these lands into a growing liability for water supply.

When they are in a natural, healthy condition, forested watersheds act as natural infrastructure. Healthy forests moderate runoff, store snowpack, filter sediment, and release water slowly and predictably into streams and rivers. However, the overgrown and degraded state of many forests across the West is preventing our lands from providing these benefits even before wildfire comes into play. When forests become unnaturally dense or are dominated by dead and dying trees, hydrologic function is impaired. Increased evapotranspiration can reduce runoff, while dense canopies and accumulated debris prevent snow from reaching the forest floor and infiltrating soils.

Of course, the same poor conditions impacting natural function also plays a central role in determining wildfire behavior and watershed outcomes, causing impacts to reverberate even farther downstream, affecting irrigated agriculture, municipal water systems, hydropower, fisheries, and aquatic ecosystems.

Direct and Long-term Water Management Impacts of Catastrophic Wildfire

Given the horrific loss of life and devastation to local communities that wildfires often cause, it is easy to understand why the risk to water supply is often overlooked. But bad forest conditions and

the resulting catastrophic wildfires have become an increasingly dominant force in impacting Western water resources and are growing more profound and costly each year.

While fire has always played a role in forest ecosystems, today's fires are larger in scale and often burn with a severity far outside historic norms. This "new normal" expands the direct impacts to water facilities and other infrastructure within a fire's footprint and fundamentally alters watersheds that serve as the foundation of Western water supplies.

Catastrophic wildfires frequently damage critical water and power infrastructure. Alliance members rely on water storage and conveyance infrastructure, along with power facilities, located in wildfire-prone forests. Wildfires frequently cause significant and costly damage to these facilities, along with the ability to safely access, operate and maintain critical facilities. High-severity fires also strip vegetation from upland watersheds, increasing sediment and nutrient loading in rivers and reservoirs. When vegetation is consumed by high-intensity wildfire, soils often become hydrophobic — literally "water-repelling." Water providers are often forced to contend with degraded source water quality, clogged intake structures, damaged reservoirs, and higher treatment costs. In many cases, post-fire flooding and debris flows can damage or destroy infrastructure entirely, creating long-term disruptions to water delivery systems.

Wildfires also cause long-term hydrologic changes that can persist for decades. After severe wildfire changes soil composition and other natural characteristics of a forest, snow and rainfall no longer infiltrate soils but instead run rapidly off hardened, exposed ground. The result is increased peak flows, erosion, debris flows, and long-term reductions in water storage and reliability. The consequences for water reliability are significant. Burned watersheds often shift from functioning as water reservoirs to behaving like impermeable surfaces, producing floods in the short term and reduced base flows over time. Agricultural producers face increased uncertainty in water availability, while municipalities must invest heavily to protect drinking water sources. Aquatic habitat suffers as streams are scoured by sediment and altered flow regimes, undermining decades of conservation and restoration investments.

Healthy forests are inseparable from reliable water supplies. If current trends continue, increasingly severe wildfires will continue to degrade watersheds, threaten water infrastructure, and undermine the long-term security of Western water systems. Reinvesting in active forest management is therefore not only a forest health imperative, but a water security necessity for the American West.

Policy and Practical Solutions

Protecting Western water resources requires a shift toward proactive, risk-based forest and watershed management. Strategic thinning, prescribed fire, and targeted restoration can reduce fuel loads, restore forest structure, improve soil infiltration, and protect the hydrologic function of watersheds. Streamlining project approvals and prioritizing treatments in high-risk source watersheds would allow land managers to act at the scale necessary to meaningfully reduce wildfire impacts.

Regardless of how our forests reached their current condition, the responsibility before us is clear: we must act. Continued inaction is no longer acceptable. Forests are living systems, and their recovery will require both respect for natural processes and deliberate, hands-on management by those who know the land best. Time-tested ecological tools, paired with proactive human stewardship, can still restore these landscapes. If we fail to act now, we risk losing our forests, along with the water, wildlife, and communities that depend on them, for an entire generation. The good news is that science and experience show us that we can reverse these trends if we are empowered to take meaningful action. The Alliance believes the following issues need to be addressed to move us in the right direction.

Active Management and Restoration

Prolonged drought, climate change, and declining snowpack have disrupted the natural function of forested watersheds across the West. As a result, forests no longer regulate water flows as they once did. This function can be restored through active management. Healthy forest floors, natural tree densities and fire regimes, and other forest-specific restoration goals can once again slow, store, and filter water through thoughtful management.

A responsible, continuous approach to fuels reduction is essential. Mechanical thinning, prescribed fire, managed grazing, and targeted timber harvest reduce tree stress, limit disease and insect outbreaks, lower evapotranspiration, and protect wildlife habitat. These practices also reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, which increasingly threatens forests, communities, and water supplies. Active management is both sound stewardship and sound economics. Without it, fuel accumulation, drought stress, and high-intensity fire will continue to drive forests into a costly and destructive cycle.

Using the Full Toolbox

No single tool can restore forest health on its own. Successful restoration depends on using the full suite of proven management practices. Controlled fire plays a vital role in reducing fuels and renewing forest floors, but it must be complemented by other actions. Sustainable timber harvest removes excess and dead material, supports domestic wood supplies, and allows forests to be managed responsibly rather than abandoned to decay and burn. When done properly, it is among the most effective tools available for improving forest conditions.

Likewise, grazing is an essential component of healthy forest and grassland systems. Forest grasslands support both wildlife and livestock, and properly managed grazing improves soil structure, returns carbon to the ground, reduces fine fuels, and sustains working landscapes. Excluding grazing from forest management ignores its ecological value and risks cascading impacts to soil health, habitat connectivity, wildlife populations, and rural economies. When used together, these tools restore balance and resilience across forested landscapes.

Restoring Water Function

Healthy forests function as natural sponges. Snow settles among trees, rainfall infiltrates the soil, and water is released gradually into streams and rivers. Decades of mismanagement, compounded

by climate change, have disrupted this cycle. Restoring upland watersheds is therefore inseparable from restoring forest health. Integrated approaches—sometimes described as agroforestry—can rebuild soils, improve water quality and quantity, and reduce wildfire risk. The science is sound, the techniques are proven, and the capacity to act already exists. What is needed now is coordinated planning, sustained investment, and the will to move forward.

Engaging the U.S. Forest Service

Because the U.S. Forest Service manages vast areas of Western forestland, its leadership and engagement are indispensable. Meeting today's challenges will require bold action and a shift away from fragmented decision-making. Restoration needs span millions of acres, and small-scale projects alone will not achieve meaningful change. Decision-makers must be empowered to act, and expertise must be trusted.

Effective planning must include Forest Service professionals alongside private land managers, scientists, watershed experts, grazers, and local community leaders. Together, they can design strategies that recognize forests as integrated systems—supporting water, wildlife, recreation, agriculture, and rural economies. Federal law already mandates multiple use and sustained yield. A successful plan must focus on moving forests from their current, non-functioning condition toward long-term resilience and productivity.

Those of us who live and work in rural Western communities have witnessed firsthand the consequences of inaction. For decades, forest management on federal lands has been slowed or halted by procedural complexity and litigation, even when projects are designed to restore ecosystem function and reduce risk. As wildfire suppression consumes an ever-growing share of the U.S. Forest Service budget - rising from 16 percent in 1995 to more than half of agency spending in recent years - fewer resources remain for restoration and prevention. This imbalance has created a dangerous cycle: unmanaged forests burn more severely, suppression costs rise, and the capacity to restore forests further declines.

It is essential that we shift toward a risk-management approach to forest stewardship—one that prioritizes timely, science-based action over paralysis by process. Streamlining forest health projects, reducing unnecessary delays, and focusing resources on preventative management are critical to protecting water supplies, wildlife habitat, recreation, food production, and rural livelihoods. Without decisive action, fear, over-analysis, and continued inaction will ensure that more forests—and the communities that depend on them—are lost to catastrophic wildfire.

Improving Funding and Delivery

Federal investments in conservation and restoration are essential, but their effectiveness depends on clarity and accountability. Agencies should clearly articulate program goals, funding priorities, and delivery mechanisms to build confidence among stakeholders and ensure funds reach the ground where they can do the most good. While agency discretion is necessary, on-the-ground experience from land managers and local partners provides valuable guidance for aligning funding with real-world needs. Well-designed programs can strengthen ecosystems while also supporting working lands and rural communities.

Reducing Regulatory Barriers and Other Delays

From our decades of collective expertise, we know that lengthy and duplicative regulatory processes, along with fringe environmental litigants that take advantage of the overly complicated compliance requirements to weaponize the judicial system against critical science-driven forest treatments and projects, must be addressed to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration. We aren't advocating for changes that waive or ignore existing federal environmental laws. Instead, we call for improvements to make those laws work for the benefit of the nation as intended. By eliminating duplicative or unnecessary processes and using streamlining tools already allowed under the law - and promoting action instead of litigation - the status quo could be changed. Improving regulation of forest management activities would help government agencies use their limited resources to expeditiously implement land management actions designed to prevent wildfires and improve habitat for priority, endangered and/or threatened species. Surely that would be a dramatic improvement over spending precious time and resources on bureaucratic process and litigation. These types of critically needed procedural changes will improve our Western landscapes and protect our valuable water supplies from the devastating effects of wildfires. They will also allow agencies to improve habitat, restore ecosystems for the benefit of federally important species and allow continued agricultural use of our public lands.

Increasing the efficiency of environmental analysis would enable the Forest Service to do more to increase the health and productivity of our national forests and grasslands and be more responsive to requests for goods and services. The Forest Service's goal should be to complete project decision-making in a timelier manner, improve or eliminate inefficient processes and steps, and, where appropriate, increase the scale of analysis and the number of activities in a single analysis and decision. The use of technology should be a part of this effort. Improving the efficiency of environmental analysis and decision making will ensure that lands and watersheds are sustainable, healthy, and productive; mitigate wildfire risk; and contribute to the economic health of rural communities through use and access opportunities.

Fix Our Forests Act and Other Legislation

Based on the principles outlined above, we encourage Congress to pass the Fix Our Forests Act (H.R. 471/S.1472) which would be a tangible first step toward prioritizing positive actions to restore our forests. While the House and Senate versions differ to some degree, these bipartisan bills provide practical tools to address declining forest health and escalating wildfire risk while protecting communities, watersheds, and critical infrastructure. The legislation promotes collaboration among federal, state, tribal, and local partners; streamlines environmental reviews for forest management projects; strengthens stewardship contracting; deters frivolous litigation; and prioritizes treatments in high-risk forests near vulnerable communities. It also advances science-based management, improves coordination of wildfire resilience grants, supports wildland firefighters and their families, and encourages active management to protect powerlines and other essential infrastructure. Together, these provisions would reduce wildfire severity, protect water supplies, and improve ecosystem resilience.

The Alliance previously supported the Fix Our Forests Act in the 118th Congress, where it passed the House with strong bipartisan support, reflecting broad agreement on the need for action-

oriented forest management solutions. In the current Congress, the Alliance has again joined a broad coalition of water providers, farmers, utilities, forestry professionals, and local governments in support of H.R. 471/S.1472, alongside organizations including the American Farm Bureau, American Forest Resource Council, Association of California Water Agencies, California Farm Bureau Federation, and the National Association of Counties.

While the Alliance would like to see certain provisions in the Fix Our Forests Act go even further in accelerating forest treatments and increasing funding for forest management activities, we appreciate the importance of the bipartisan nature of the bills in the House and Senate which is critical to making durable, long-term policy improvements.

The Alliance also supports other legislative efforts aimed at accelerating the pace and scale of forest restoration and wildfire recovery. In recent years, this includes the Watershed Protection Act and the Headwaters Protection Act (H.R. 605) in the 119th Congress, along with the *America's Revegetation and Carbon Sequestration Act*, co-sponsored by Senators John Barrasso (R-WY) and Joe Manchin (D-WV).

Headwaters of the Colorado River Initiative

My family and many others in the community are helping lead an effort to design a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder, large-landscape initiative to restore two severely degraded, non-functioning 50,000-acre watersheds - one in the Medicine Bow National Forest in Wyoming and the other in the Routt National Forest in Colorado. The "Headwaters of the Colorado" (HOC) initiative aims to restore these forested rangelands to a resilient condition that filters and stores water, supports livestock production, sustains wildlife and fisheries, sequesters carbon, provides renewable energy feedstocks, and supports economically viable rural communities.

The Little Snake River Watershed is a unique landscape anchored by a highly functioning conservation district with a 30-year record of nationally recognized river restoration, grazing and habitat improvements, fish passage, and migratory bird enhancement projects. As a key headwater of the Colorado River Basin, the watershed is increasingly affected by warming temperatures and reduced snowpack, decades of fire suppression that have heightened wildfire risk, and competing land-use demands across multiple sectors.

The HOC team is developing an integrated, multi-disciplinary watershed restoration strategy designed to demonstrate how collaborative, large-scale restoration can be implemented and replicated across the West. The effort will include stakeholder outreach, an assessment of baseline environmental conditions, and development of a coordinated restoration plan spanning private lands, state lands in Wyoming and Colorado, and federal lands managed by the Medicine Bow–Routt National Forest and the BLM's Little Snake and Rawlins field offices.

People who live and work in these forests bring firsthand knowledge of watershed conditions and view them as interconnected, functioning ecosystems. From their perspective, these forested watersheds are in steep decline due to decades of siloed, top-down management and litigation that has stalled practical restoration efforts. Climate change has further compounded these challenges.

We believe it is time for a new approach. One centered on large-landscape, integrated restoration guided by meaningful, multi-stakeholder collaboration. Provisions in the Fix Our Forests Act that promote federal, state, tribal, and local cooperation would significantly enhance the ability of the HOC partners to achieve lasting success.

Additional Examples of Wildfire Impacts and Projects to Improve Forest Health

While there are more examples of the direct and indirect impacts of unnatural forest conditions and catastrophic wildfires on water management than can be highlighted in this testimony, below are examples from several regions that demonstrate the breadth of potential impacts and the importance of acting swiftly to reverse the declining conditions of our forested watersheds.

Yakima Basin

In July 2024, the Retreat Fire scorched more than 45,000 acres of state and federal forests in Yakima County, Washington. These forested slopes above the Yakima-Tieton irrigation canal in central Washington, leaving the steep terrain highly unstable. After the blaze, rain and gravity loosened soil and rocks on the burned hillsides, causing debris and boulders to crash into the canal's structure. The extreme heat also weakened the concrete core of the aging canal. As a result, crews have identified thousands of leaks along the canal's seams and ongoing land instability continues to threaten its integrity. This damage continues to force frequent shutdowns and patching, with the long-term solution requiring a $240 million project to replace the entire canal.

Because this canal supplies irrigation water to approximately 35,000 acres of orchards in the Yakima Valley — one of the region's most productive agricultural areas — the impaired infrastructure has had real consequences for water supply reliability. The instability and leaks reduce the efficiency and predictability of water delivery for growers and increase the risk of shortages during peak demand periods. This infrastructure damage and resulting water delivery interruptions and rising repair costs highlight the importance of reducing wildfire risk to avoid jeopardizing irrigation systems and the broader agricultural economy dependent on them.

Central/Southern Oregon

In Central Oregon, poor forest conditions and increased wildfire risk have caused electric utilities to utilize "enhanced safety settings" on their distribution system that result in shutting off power. Throughout the past summer, Ochoco Irrigation Districts (OID) experienced a number of widespread power outages to irrigated lands and pump stations that resulted in the need to dump water due to the fact that landowner or district pumps were shut off and the water that remains in the system has to be released to prevent a canal blowout. In the summer of 2025 alone, OID estimates that shutoffs directly caused the loss of 200 million gallons of water that could have been delivered on farm or stayed in the reservoir.

Wildfire doesn't need to be massive in scale to have significant and costly impacts water operations. In Southern Oregon, the roughly 3,000 acre Almeda Fire in September 2020 burned the towns of Talent and Phoenix and knocked out power to Medford Irrigation District's diversion

structure, preventing water deliveries from the impacted canal for two days during a critical time for crops. The fire also burned part of a 48-inch-diameter water supply pipe buried underground.

Northern California

The forests of Northern California are at a tipping point. If something isn't done to stop the burning in Northern California and the Sierra, we will not have forests remaining and the clean water and other multiple uses of these lands will be lost. While wildfires have heavily impacted State and National Forests across the state, the Shasta-Trinity National Forest has been especially hard hit, with multiple, monumental experienced high-intensity fires, such as the Dixie Fire, which burned 963,309 acres in 2021. Since 2021, the Park fire burned 429,000 acres, and the Green Fire in 2025 in Shasta County burnt 19,000 acres. The Trinity side of Shasta-Trinity has experienced numerous fires in the last decade. The August Complex alone burned 1,032,648 acres (1614 square miles), about the size of the state of Rhode Island. The burn impacted the South Fork of the Trinity, a free-flowing, cold-water tributary of the Klamath River that is critical to the return of native fish to the Klamath. The loss of soil in this watershed because of high-intensity fire is causing tons of sediment to flow into one of the most pristine watersheds in the North State. We must act quickly to protect both the forest and the communities that depend on it for their future.

To prevent these continued impacts, there are many local initiatives to restore forest lands and protect headwaters. One example is the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP), of which Yuba Water (a Family Farm Alliance member) is a founding member. This diverse group of stakeholders is implementing forest restoration across 275,000 acres of the watershed. By mitigating the risk of high-intensity wildfire and restoring forest health, the NYFP will protect a variety of vital resources, including wildlife habitat, water supply, opportunities for recreation, as well as multiple communities.

The partnership announced that wildfire risk reduction treatments are beginning near Camptonville and New Bullards Bar Reservoir following the signing of the Record of Decision for Subproject Area #2 of the North Yuba Landscape Resilience Project (NYLRP). The NYLRP spans about 275,000 acres of forest land in the North Yuba River watershed and represents one of the largest coordinated vegetation and fuels management efforts in the Sierra Nevada. Implementation phases are advancing, prioritizing high-risk communities, evacuation routes, and key fuel-break locations. The Yuba I Forest Resilience Bond (FRB)—an innovative finance tool that helped fund accelerated restoration—was completed in 2023, with work on roughly 15,000 acres of the Tahoe National Forest. This project reduced wildfire risk, restored ecosystems, protected watershed resilience, and successfully returned investor capital.

Building on this, the partnership has advanced larger financing initiatives such as the Yuba II FRB (about $25 million) to support prioritized treatments across 16,800 acres in the watershed. These bonds help accelerate restoration by providing upfront capital that federal grants alone would not deliver as quickly. Planning for landscape-scale restoration began in 2018, and the nine partner organizations continue to collaboratively plan, analyze, finance, and implement treatments using a mix of ecological thinning, fuels reduction, and prescribed fire to enhance forest resilience.

New Mexico

Over the last decade, New Mexico has experienced some of the most severe wildfires in its recorded history — including the *Calf Canyon/Hermits Peak* and *Black Fire* complexes in 2022 that together burned hundreds of thousands of acres — as well as other significant burn scars like the area affected by the Silver Fire. These wildfires are not just disturbances to forests and communities; they fundamentally alter watershed health, downstream water quality, and the very lifeblood of rural agriculture in the desert southwest. When vegetation is consumed by high-intensity wildfire, soils often become hydrophobic — literally "water-repelling." In the years following a fire, even modest rainfall events can produce rapid, high-volume runoff because the ground cannot absorb water as it did prior to burning. This amplified runoff carries sediment, ash, nutrients, and woody debris into rivers, reservoirs, and irrigation systems.

These changes have multiple, interrelated impacts:

Water Quality Degradation — Post-wildfire runoff introduces elevated sediment loads, nutrients such as nitrate and phosphorous, ash, and other contaminants into surface waters. Increased turbidity and nutrient concentrations can drive algal blooms, lower oxygen levels, and harm aquatic life — from fish to invertebrates — in streams and rivers relied upon for irrigation and drinking water.

Infrastructure Stress and Failure Risks — Sediment and debris mobilized from burn scars can physically damage water infrastructure. A notable example on the Rio Grande Project occurred following the *Silver Fire* burn scar when a 2016 precipitation event flushed woody debris into Caballo Reservoir. The debris clogged Caballo Dam's outlet works, severely limiting the ability to release water downstream to irrigation districts and municipalities and causing the release of water to be shut off early in the season. Efforts to unclog the outlet were unsafe and only partially effective, illustrating how wildfire-related runoff can compromise critical water delivery infrastructure. Similar post-fire sediment plugs have occurred in the Rio Grande downstream of Cochiti Dam, halting water deliveries to downstream users.

Agricultural Water Supply Impacts — These watershed and infrastructure vulnerabilities directly affect the ability of farmers and ranchers to access reliable water for irrigation. Southern New Mexico's agricultural economy depends on water released from reservoirs like Caballo and Elephant Butte. When fires increase sediment loads and clog delivery systems, water cannot be released efficiently or at needed volumes, threatening crops (e.g., alfalfa, pecans, vegetables) and the livelihoods of rural producers who feed regional, national, and global markets. Increased

Flood and Debris Flow Risks — Burned landscapes are prone to debris flows and flash floods that can be more destructive than the original fire, damaging roads, homes, farm and ranch infrastructure, and irrigation conveyance systems. These events compound the risk of water quality degradation and increase costs for mitigation and repairs.

Taken together, these impacts illustrate that wildfire is not an isolated hazard; it is a watershed hazard multiplier that directly undermines water quality, infrastructure functionality, and agricultural productivity.

Colorado

The October 2020 193,812-acre East Troublesome Fire on Colorado's western slope scorched a large portion of the watersheds that feed key reservoirs and water facilities of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, a transmountain diversion system managed by Northern Water that supplies irrigation water to roughly 600,000 acres of farmland and municipal and industrial users on Colorado's Front Range. During the active fire and there was an acute concern that power loss and shutdown of diversion operations would occur – an impact that thankfully didn't materialize but could have resulted in prolonged loss of irrigation deliveries.

In the immediate aftermath, the loss of vegetation and soil stability raised the risk of sediment, ash, and debris flows into streams and reservoirs, threatening water quality and storage capacity. Elevated sediment loads were observed in tributaries such as Willow Creek, reducing reservoir capacity and complicating treatment processes, especially during snowmelt and heavy rain events. Northern Water and partner agencies launched extensive post-fire watershed protection and restoration efforts — including detention structures, mulching, debris booms, and erosion control — to mitigate erosion, reduce sediment delivery to critical storage reservoirs, and protect infrastructure from flash flood hazards.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Alliance and to highlight the ongoing work we are doing on the ground to improve watersheds and protect water resources. We urge Congress to take immediate and ongoing action to provide the authority and funding needed to address our forest health crisis. This includes enacting the Fix Our Forest Act, providing sufficient funding to take action, and maintaining diligent oversight to ensure the authority and funding that is provided is being used effectively and efficiently. The Alliance stands ready to partner with the Subcommittee to advance practical, durable solutions to the forest health crisis.

As a final concluding matter of utmost importance, the Alliance would like to acknowledge the late Congressman Doug LaMalfa, who was a strong friend and consistent advocate for the Family Farm Alliance and for Western agriculture. Congressman LaMalfa understood the realities facing irrigated agriculture and rural communities, and his leadership on water, land management, and infrastructure issues reflected a deep commitment to the people he served. His voice and perspective will be missed. We are grateful for his dedication to our cause, his friendship to the Alliance, and his service to our nation.