



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Staff,
Michelle Lane (Michelle.Lane@mail.house.gov) and Lucas Drill
(Lucas.Drill@mail.house.gov) x5-0500
Date: May 12, 2025
Subject: Oversight Hearing titled *“Fix Our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface”*

The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will hold an oversight hearing titled *“Fix Our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface”* on **Thursday, May 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Jace McNaught (Jace.McNaught@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on May 14 if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- For more than a century, preservationist activists have fought against sound forest management, effectively loving our forests to death.
- Healthy and resilient forests require active management, keeping our natural environments and communities safe from total annihilation by wildfire.
- The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) is growing rapidly and is at constant risk of being devastated by wildfires.
- As wildfires have become more destructive, property owners in WUI communities have faced considerable difficulties securing insurance coverage and filing successful claims in the event of a wildfire catastrophe.
- Republicans in Congress have worked tirelessly to pass the “Fix Our Forests Act,” which will serve as the crucial aerial assault needed to douse the flames of the catastrophic wildfire crisis in the United States.

II. WITNESSES

- **Mr. Dan Munsey**, Fire Chief and Fire Warden, San Bernardino County Fire Protection District, San Bernardino, CA
- **Mr. Matt Weiner**, CEO, Megafire Action, Los Angeles, CA
- **Mr. Roy Wright**, President and CEO, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, Richburg, SC
- **Mr. Neil Chapman**, Wildland Fire Captain, Flagstaff Fire Department, Flagstaff, AZ
(*Minority witness*)

III. BACKGROUND

Introduction to the Catastrophic Wildfire Crisis



Los Angeles County's 2025 Eaton Fire devastated WUI communities at the base of the Angeles National Forest's San Gabriel Mountains, as well as the National Forest itself.¹

For more than a century, preservationist activists have fought against sound forest management, effectively loving our forests to death.² Undoubtedly, our nation's forests ought to be conserved for ourselves and our posterity. But as communities have settled closer to and even within wildlands, and as fire exclusion practices intended to preserve forests have allowed tree densities to increase drastically, forest composition to change, and fire fuel to build, forest conservation requires active management to keep our forests and communities safe from total annihilation by wildfire.³

The House Committee on Natural Resources (Committee) has written extensively about the catastrophic wildfire crisis in the United States.⁴ Across the U.S., more than one billion acres of

¹ Aida Amer, *In photos: L.A. County burns as Eaton Fire explodes in Southern California*, AXIOS (Jan. 8, 2025), <https://www.axios.com/2025/01/08/los-angeles-wildfires-eaton-california-photos>; see also Amanda Monthei, *Saving historic Mount Wilson and crucial communications from Eaton Fire*, U.S. FOREST SERVICE (Apr. 7, 2025), <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/features/saving-historic-mount-wilson-and-crucial-communications-eaton-fire>.

² See Michael Hoover, *Loving Our Forests to Death / Sparing all the trees may doom the forest and our communities*, SFGATE (Aug. 22, 2003), <https://www.sfgate.com/opinion/openforum/article/loving-our-forests-to-death-sparing-all-the-2560509.php>.

³ See, e.g., Fix Our Forests Act, H.R. 471, 119th Cong. (2025).

⁴ See, e.g., *Conservation in a Crown Jewel: A Discussion About Wildfires and Forest Health*, Field Oversight Hearing before the Subcomm. on Federal Lands of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources, 118th Cong. (Aug. 11, 2023) (hearing memorandum), https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hearing_memo_-_ov_field_hrg_in_yosemite_08.11.23.pdf; Discussion Draft of H.R. ____ (Rep. Westerman), "To expedite under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and improve forest management activities on National Forest System lands, on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, and on Tribal lands to return resilience to overgrown, fire-prone forested lands, and for other purposes," Legislative Hearing before the

land are at risk of being consumed by wildfire.⁵ Of those, approximately 117 million acres owned by the federal government have been identified as “high” or “very high” risk for wildfire.⁶ These 117 million highly at-risk federal acres represent nearly 20 percent of the entire federal estate.⁷

Over the last two decades, wildfires in the U.S. have burned an average of 7 million acres annually.⁸ In 2024, nearly 9 million acres were lost.⁹ These statistics dwarf those seen as recently as the 1990s and even the early 2000s.¹⁰ In the last decade, wildfires have directly caused hundreds of deaths.¹¹ These catastrophic wildfires are estimated to cost “between \$394 billion and \$893 billion annually, equal to 2–4 percent of U.S. GDP.”¹² The 2025 Los Angeles wildfires alone are estimated to have caused upwards of \$250 billion in damage.¹³ Costs include impacts such as property damage, lost income, contamination of water resources, timber loss, and more.¹⁴ Only by working to fix our forests can we reverse the annually increasing loss of life and destruction caused by wildfires in the WUI.

Subcomm. on Federal Lands of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources, 118th Cong. (Apr. 17, 2024) (hearing memorandum), <https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/117027/documents/HHRG-118-II10-20240417-SD002.pdf>.

⁵ See, e.g., *Conservation in a Crown Jewel: A Discussion About Wildfires and Forest Health*, Field Oversight Hearing before the Subcomm. on Federal Lands of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources, 118th Cong. (Aug. 11, 2023) (hearing memorandum), https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hearing_memo_-_ov_field_hrg_in_yosemite_08.11.23.pdf.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Wildfires and Acres*, NATIONAL INTERAGENCY FIRE CENTER (2025), <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Discussion Draft of H.R. ____ (Rep. Westerman), “To expedite under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and improve forest management activities on National Forest System lands, on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, and on Tribal lands to return resilience to overgrown, fire-prone forested lands, and for other purposes,”* Legislative Hearing before the Subcomm. on Federal Lands of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources, 118th Cong. (Apr. 17, 2024) (hearing memorandum), <https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/117027/documents/HHRG-118-II10-20240417-SD002.pdf>.

¹² Sara Sutherland et al., *PERC Wildfire Risk Map*, PERC (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://perc.org/2025/02/25/perc-wildfire-risk-map/>.

¹³ Roger Vincent, *Estimated cost of fire damage balloons to more than \$250 billion*, LOS ANGELES TIMES (Jan. 24, 2025), <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2025-01-24/estimated-cost-of-fire-damage-balloons-to-more-than-250-billion>.

¹⁴ Sara Sutherland et al., *PERC Wildfire Risk Map*, PERC (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://perc.org/2025/02/25/perc-wildfire-risk-map/>.

Understanding the Wildland-Urban Interface



An aerial view of Altadena, CA, which sits squarely within the WUI at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains' Angeles National Forest, and which burned in Los Angeles County's 2025 Eaton Fire.¹⁵

The WUI is the “zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development.”¹⁶ The WUI is “the line, area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.”¹⁷ Accordingly, the WUI is a “focal area for human-environment conflicts” caused by wildfires, which destroy homes, businesses, and other structures.¹⁸

The WUI is considerably larger than many assume. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service (USFS), more than 70,000 communities are at risk of WUI fires.¹⁹ As of 2022, these communities were estimated to consist of more than 46 million housing units, accounting for nearly a third of all U.S. homes.²⁰ And as people “seek to escape the hustle and bustle of city life” by moving to areas “near the beauty of natural landscapes within forests, in the foothills of scenic mountain ranges, or in the pastoral countryside,”²¹ the WUI area “continues to grow by approximately 2 million acres per year.”²² California, Texas, Florida,

¹⁵ See *Eaton Fire*, CAL FIRE (Apr. 3, 2025), <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/1/7/eaton-fire>; Amber X. Chen, *Altadena Residents Question Why Evacuation Warnings Came So Late*, LOS ANGELES PUBLIC PRESS (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://lapublicpress.org/2025/01/altadena-eaton-fire-evacuation-warning-notification/>.

¹⁶ *What is the WUI?*, U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION (June 8, 2022), <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui/>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ V.C. Radeloff et al., *The wildland-urban interface in the United States*, ECOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS (2005), <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/14912>.

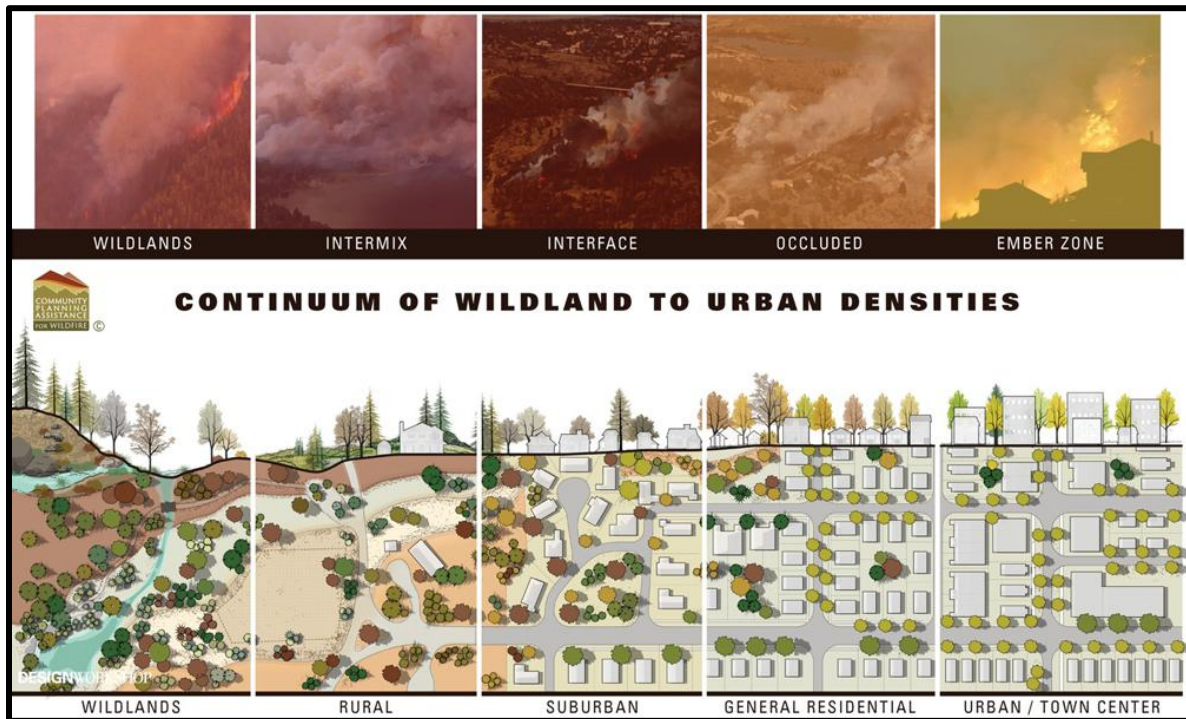
¹⁹ *Fire Adapted Communities*, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/fac>.

²⁰ *Id.*; *Fire-Resistant Construction in the Wildland-Urban Interface*, International Code Council, <https://www.iccsafe.org/products-and-services/wildland-urban-interface/>.

²¹ *Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and Wildfire Risks*, FRONTLINE WILDFIRE DEFENSE (2025), <https://www.frontlinewildfire.com/wildfire-news-and-resources/wildland-urban-interface-wui-and-wildfire-risks/>.

²² *What is the WUI?*, U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION (June 8, 2022), <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui/>.

North Carolina, and Pennsylvania contain the greatest number of homes in the WUI, illustrating that WUI areas span across the United States.²³



The WUI “exists along a continuum of wildland to urban densities” as depicted by the Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire.²⁴

A growing WUI population poses significant risk. Not only are people living in the WUI subject to wildfire dangers stemming from wildland and forest mismanagement, but also the “wildfire threat is further heightened by the materials used to build these homes, the relative density of new developments bringing flammable structures closer together, and the non-native, and often invasive, species that crowd out burn-resistant vegetation.”²⁵ Because of this, between 2002 and 2016, “an average of over 3,000 structures per year were lost to WUI fires in the United States.”²⁶ Without proper forest management practices and a conscious effort by those living in WUI communities to protect themselves from wildfires, fire destruction in WUI areas are only anticipated to increase.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Molly Mowery, *Living on the Edge: Get to Know Your Wildland-Urban Interface*, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION (Jan. 16, 2018), <https://www.planning.org/blog/blogpost/9141903/>.

²⁵ *Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and Wildfire Risks*, FRONTLINE WILDFIRE DEFENSE (2025), <https://www.frontlinewildfire.com/wildfire-news-and-resources/wildland-urban-interface-wui-and-wildfire-risks/>.

²⁶ *What is the WUI?*, U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION (June 8, 2022), <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui/>.

Federal Forest Mismanagement Enflames Wildfire Devastation



Dead and down wood on Bill Williams Mountain in the Kaibab National Forest in Coconino County, AZ.²⁷ Coconino County's Forest Restoration Initiative, which includes beneficial fire and mechanical thinning treatments, is an example of more effective forest management.²⁸

Across the country, U.S. forests have been mismanaged, allowing wildfire risk to skyrocket. As the Committee has previously made clear, our nation's forests are overloaded with dangerous dry fuels that have accumulated due to lack of management practices like thinning, prescribed burns, and mechanical treatments.²⁹ This mismanagement makes forests less resilient by increasing competition among trees and other vegetation for water, minerals, and sunlight crucial to sustainable forest health.³⁰ For example, before European settlement, California's forests held approximately 64 trees per acre.³¹ Now, each acre of the same California forests unsustainably holds more than 300 trees.³² As a result of this unnatural density, more than 173 million trees have died over the course of the last two decades.³³

The importance of proper federal forest management can be seen plainly. In California's Angeles National Forest, an 8,685-acre forest management project intended to utilize management techniques like thinning was stalled by extensive permitting delays despite land managers

²⁷ *Coconino County Forest Restoration Initiative*, COCONINO COUNTY ARIZONA (2025), <https://www.coconino.az.gov/2083/Forest-Restoration>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *E.g., Conservation in a Crown Jewel: A Discussion About Wildfires and Forest Health*, Field Oversight Hearing before the Subcomm. on Federal Lands of the H. Comm. on Natural Resources, 118th Cong. (Aug. 11, 2023) (hearing memorandum), https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hearing_memo_-_ov_field_hrg_in_yosemite_08.11.23.pdf.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

recognizing the danger of the Angeles Forest’s neglect.³⁴ These delays caused the Forestwide Fuel Maintenance Strategy to break ground nearly 4 years late, preventing crucial work from occurring before the Los Angeles Eaton fire outbreak, which wreaked havoc on the forest and nearby WUI communities.³⁵ Contrastingly, after experiencing disastrous wildfires and subsequent floods, Coconino County in Arizona has effectively worked with Federal entities to implement mechanical thinning and beneficial fire treatments through its Four Forest Restoration Initiative.³⁶ This effort recognizes that “wildfire and post-wildfire flooding are the greatest public safety threats to its residents, businesses, economy and financial solvency.”³⁷ Accordingly, the Arizona-based initiative has treated more than 1.4 million acres since 2010 to reduce wildfire risk to forests and WUI communities.³⁸ Embracing these sound forest management practices not only increases the likelihood that an area survive a wildfire, but also more easily allows families to insure their property should a wildfire ravage their WUI community.

Protecting Life and Property in WUI Communities through Wildfire Prevention

Wildfires know no jurisdictional boundaries and often burn lands managed by multiple federal, state, and local entities.³⁹ Governments and agencies must coordinate forest management policies and activities to protect WUI communities’ lives and property through wildfire prevention. Within this framework of coordination, however, the federal government, as by far the single largest landowner in the U.S., shoulders the greatest burden to lead the development and implementation of effective land management practices. Accordingly, the decisions made by federal land management agencies, like the USFS, directly impact the ability of WUI communities to survive catastrophic wildfires and acquire and retain property insurance.

Unfortunately, much of the current approach to fighting the catastrophic wildfire crisis is “oriented towards reacting to wildfire events, often at the expense of proactive measures.”⁴⁰ Resource allocation and wildfire management strategy often “heavily favor wildfire response over proactive activities such as retrofitting structures to resist ignition, thinning vegetation near communities, or managing forests and grasslands (including through the application of beneficial fire) to mitigate wildfire risk.”⁴¹ As the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission—an entity created by USDA, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—detailed in its 2023 report, the widespread reactive approach “is not only incredibly costly, but also does little to mitigate overall wildfire risk across the country, build community

³⁴ Matt Weiner, Testimony before the U.S. Senate Comm. on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry’s Subcomm. on Conservation, Forestry, Natural Resources, and Biotechnology (Mar. 6, 2025), https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/7666d09e-0b17-4374-ca03-b38269379e87/Testimony_Weiner_03.06.2025.pdf.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Coconino County Forest Restoration Initiative*, COCONINO COUNTY ARIZONA (2025), <https://www.coconino.az.gov/2083/Forest-Restoration>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Wildfires*, CONG. BUDGET OFFICE (June 2022), <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2022-06/57970-Wildfires.pdf>.

⁴⁰ *On Fire: The Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission*, WILDLAND FIRE MITIGATION AND MANAGEMENT COMMISSION (Sept. 2023), <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

and landscape resilience to impacts, or set them on the path to post-fire recovery.”⁴² In fact, only by emphasizing “proactive pre-fire and post-fire planning and mitigation can we break the current cycle of increasingly severe wildfire risk and losses; restore fire-adapted ecosystems; reduce risks to communities and increase resilience.”⁴³

Although environmental activists who fail to understand basic principles of conservation oppose these proactive measures, they are widely known and agreed upon within the ecology research community as effective “in reducing the risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfire in forests in much of the United States, even in extreme weather conditions.”⁴⁴ These proactive measures are treatments that come in the form of thinning, which includes commercial timber harvesting, noncommercial thinning, mechanical treatments, and mastication; burning, which includes prescribed fire, cultural burning, and intentionally managed wildfire; animal grazing to reduce fuels and limit the spread of highly flammable invasive grasses; or a combination of all the treatments together depending on the landscape.⁴⁵ Because projects using these measures require environmental reviews and permitting, critical reform to project review processes under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Historic Preservation Act, is necessary for the federal government and its partners to effectively prevent catastrophic wildfires from decimating WUI communities.⁴⁶

These proactive federal measures become even more effective when coupled with fire safety strategies implemented by homeowners, businesses, and communities as a whole. These measures, which include building and maintaining defensible spaces around structures, retrofitting existing structures with noncombustible materials, fuel mapping, and installing new technologies like fire-resistant materials, road breaks, chemical agents, and sprinkler systems, can help protect homes and other structures from burning.⁴⁷ When entire communities implement these measures and receive certification from entities like the National Fire Protection Association’s Firewise USA program, the likelihood of wildfire survival is significantly amplified.⁴⁸ Together, federal, state, and local proactive measures and safety strategies directly contribute to a WUI community resident’s ability to gain and keep property insurance.

Wildfire Insurance Coverage and Claims

As wildfires have become more destructive, property owners in WUI communities have faced considerable difficulties securing insurance coverage and filing successful claims in the event of a wildfire catastrophe. In WUI areas, insurance is vital to limiting exposure to potentially devastating losses of real and personal property assets.

Traditionally, homeowners, renters, and auto insurance policies protect holders from having to pay out of pocket to repair or replace damaged or lost property in the event of wildfire. Insurance

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ See Fix Our Forests Act, H.R. 471, 119th Cong. (2025).

⁴⁷ See Geoffrey Berlin and Michael Hieb, *Wildland Urban Interface Fire Operational Requirements and Capability Analysis: Report of Findings*, U.S. DEPT. OF HOMELAND SECURITY (May 31, 2019), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/wui_fire_report_of_findings_july_24_2019v2_508.pdf.

⁴⁸ See *Firewise USA*, NFPA (2025), <https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/wildfire/firewise-usa>.

coverage, however, varies widely from policy to policy.⁴⁹ Obtaining and understanding auto and renter's insurance coverage in WUI areas is largely straightforward. For example, if a vehicle is destroyed in a wildfire, the vehicle owner's policy will often be covered under a comprehensive coverage plan; if the insured party only carries collision coverage, a claim to replace a fire-charred vehicle will most likely be denied.⁵⁰ Similarly, renters' insurance coverage varies depending on the policy but generally covers "personal belongings from damage caused by smoke, flames, and water or chemicals used to fight the fire," but does not cover the structure itself, given the policyholder's lack of ownership.⁵¹ However, some renters' insurance policies will cover temporary living expenses during property repair.⁵²

Home insurance coverage in WUI areas is considerably more elusive. Historically, home insurance policies covered wildfires and protected the principal dwelling, affiliated structures like detached garages, sheds, and guest homes, and property improvements like fences and landscaping.⁵³ Yet, many insurance companies are increasingly excluding wildfire coverage from their policies as wildfire prevalence rises, destruction is more extensive, insurance company losses spiral, and risk to carriers grows.⁵⁴ Worse yet, some insurance carriers refuse to cover structures in at-risk WUI communities entirely, others are cancelling existing insurance policies in WUI areas, and others still are hiking rates in exchange for their willingness to bear the risk.⁵⁵

In California alone, between 2014 and 2022, property insurance premiums for those fortunate enough to find coverage ballooned from \$86 million to about \$134 million.⁵⁶ And while these rising premiums are difficult for most families to stomach, the astronomical losses driving insurance carrier decision-making are clear: losses from just the Palisades and Eaton fires in Los Angeles are estimated to cost insurers between \$25.2 and \$39.4 *billion*.⁵⁷ Accordingly, those California WUI homeowners unable to afford or obtain coverage are turning to imperfect solutions like state-sponsored Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (FAIR) plans, surplus or excess (E&S) line carriers that cover additional risk for even higher rates, and special premium insurance carriers that charge an extra high premium for their coverage.⁵⁸ And even when homeowners acquire and maintain wildfire coverage, many find themselves underinsured when their homes are lost and they begin to rebuild.⁵⁹ These issues are faced not just by Californians but also by all those who live in WUI communities across the country.

Only through improved federal wildland management policies and community safety strategies can WUI wildfire be decreased so that insurers can comfortably return to formerly high-risk markets and insurance premiums decrease to affordable rates.

⁴⁹ *Wildfire insurance in high fire risk areas*, FRONTLINE WILDFIRE DEFENSE (2025), <https://www.frontlinewildfire.com/wildfire-news-and-resources/wildfire-insurance/>.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ Sheri Scott et al., *Industry insured losses for Los Angeles wildfires*, MILLIMAN (Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.milliman.com/en/insight/industry-insured-losses-for-los-angeles-wildfires>.

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ See, e.g., J. Anthony Cookson et al., *Coverage Neglect in Homeowners Insurance*, SSRN (Feb. 24, 2025), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5057551.

Existing Federal Programs Supporting WUI Communities

Beyond insurance considerations, the federal government has established several programs to support at-risk WUI communities, including:

- *Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER)*: Under the direction of the USFS, BAER is responsible for emergency stabilization after wildfires to prevent further damage to life, property, or natural resources on USFS lands.⁶⁰ The program coordinates among the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), as well as state, tribal, and local forestry and emergency management entities.⁶¹
- *Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program*: This \$1 billion five-year competitive grant program is designed to help communities that are low-income, at high risk for wildfires, or have been impacted by a severe disaster within the past 10 years that increases wildfire risk,⁶² and implement the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.⁶³
- *Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant (HMAG) Program*: HMAG's Post Fire grants are available to states, federally recognized tribes, and territories affected by fires resulting in a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) declaration.⁶⁴
- *Emergency Watersheds Protection (EWP) Program*: EWP is designed to help relieve local communities facing imminent threats to life and property due to floods, fires, and other natural disasters.⁶⁵
- *Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)*: The EFRP provides cost-share payments to eligible owners of nonindustrial private forests for rehabilitation efforts after natural disasters. These funds, which can be up to 75% of the cost to implement approved restoration plans but are limited to \$500,000 per person or legal entity per disaster, can be used for projects such as debris removal and restoration of forest roads.⁶⁶
- *Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)*: The ECP is designed to help farmers and ranchers rehabilitate their farmland following natural disasters by providing emergency funding and technical assistance.⁶⁷ The funds from this program can be used to remove debris, restore fences and conservation structures, or provide emergency water during periods of drought.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ See *Burned Area Emergency Response – BAER*, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/naturalresources/watershed/burnedareas-background.shtml>.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² See *Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program*, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/grants/cwdg>.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ See *How to Apply for Post-Fire Funding in the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program*, FEMA (Oct. 30, 2024), <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation/learn/post-fire/apply>.

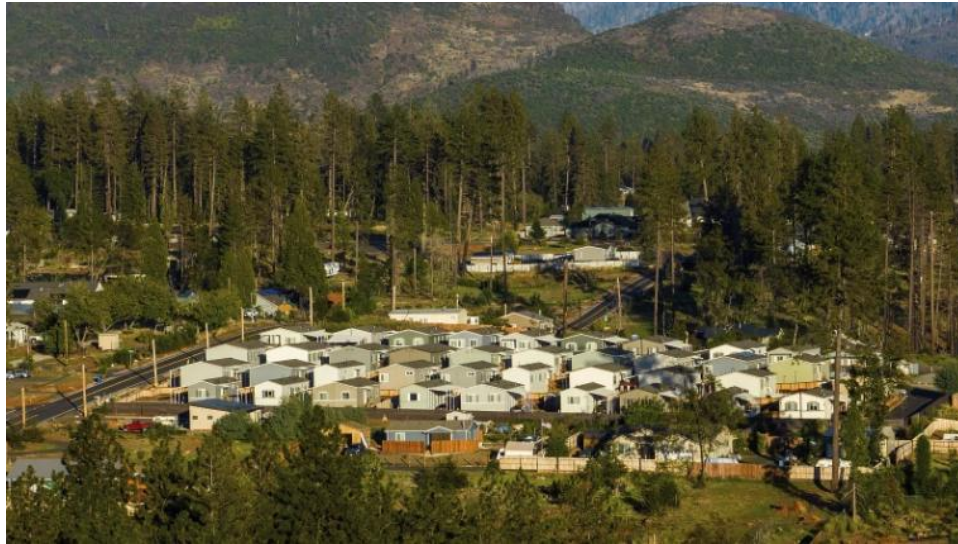
⁶⁵ See *Emergency Watershed Protection EWP*, NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ewp-emergency-watershed-protection>.

⁶⁶ See *Disaster Assistance: Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)*, U.S. FARM SERVICE, <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/tools/informational/fact-sheets/emergency-forest-restoration-program-efrp>.

⁶⁷ See *Disaster Assistance: Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)*, U.S. FARM SERVICE, <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/tools/informational/fact-sheets/emergency-conservation-program-ecp>.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

Rebuilding Resilient WUI Communities After Devastating Wildfires



A community rebuilt after the devastating California Camp Fire, captured by AP.⁶⁹

In order to more effectively protect WUI communities from repeated disasters caused by catastrophic wildfires, post-fire programs must focus on supporting “proactive planning for post-fire assessment and hazard mitigation for communities at high risk that could reduce overall impacts when an event occurs,” rather than on reactive programs solely meant to provide disaster aid.⁷⁰ In other words, rather than only paying to help rebuild communities decimated by wildfires, federal agencies should invest in preventing future disasters through wildland management practices.

According the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission has made clear, “close to 50 percent of the full community costs of wildfire are borne by local-level government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and homeowners.”⁷¹ Increasingly, costs to insurers, when available, are continuing to rise.⁷² As such, it is imperative that we continue to focus on breaking the cycle of wildfire through proactive forest management, particularly on federal lands. These measures, coupled with community and home safety strategies, will also encourage insurers to cover WUI residents more affordably and holistically.

Understanding the needs of WUI communities and the underlying scientific and policy tenets of sound wildfire prevention measures, Republicans in Congress have worked tirelessly to implement legislation that will have a positive lasting impact on the catastrophic wildfire crisis.⁷³ In January 2025, the House of Representatives passed the “Fix Our Forests Act”. The policies championed by this Act, to “improve forest management activities on National Forest System

⁶⁹ Adam Beam and Olga R. Rodriguez, *5 years after California’s deadliest wildfire, survivors forge different paths toward recovery*, AP NEWS (Nov. 7, 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/paradise-wildfire-california-anniversary-five-years-b4434481c38e6a02e9f2d376ac172b04>.

⁷⁰ *On Fire: The Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission*, WILDLAND FIRE MITIGATION AND MANAGEMENT COMMISSION (Sept. 2023), <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf>.

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ See Fix Our Forests Act, H.R. 471, 119th Cong. (2025).

lands, on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, and on Tribal lands to return resilience to overgrown, fire-prone forested lands,” will serve as the crucial aerial assault needed to douse the flames of the growing wildfire crisis in the United States.⁷⁴

[Section-By-Section of H.R. 471, Chairman Westerman’s “Fix Our Forests Act”](#)

[One-pager on “Fix Our Forests Act”.](#)

⁷⁴ *Id.*