

**FIX OUR FORESTS: HOW IMPROVED
MANAGEMENT CAN PROTECT
COMMUNITIES IN THE
WILD-URBAN INTERFACE**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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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 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 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

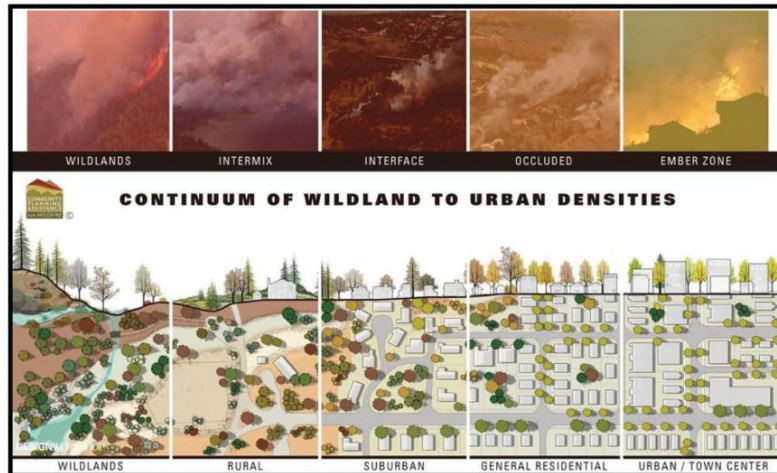
Over the last two decades, wildfires in the U.S. have burned an average of 7 million acres annually.⁸ In 2024, nearly 9 million acres were lost.⁹ These statistics dwarf those seen as recently as the 1990s and even the early 2000s.¹⁰ In the last decade, wildfires have directly caused hundreds of deaths.¹¹ 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.

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, 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.

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 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 toward 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 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 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 canceling 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.

Existing Federal Programs Supporting WUI Communities

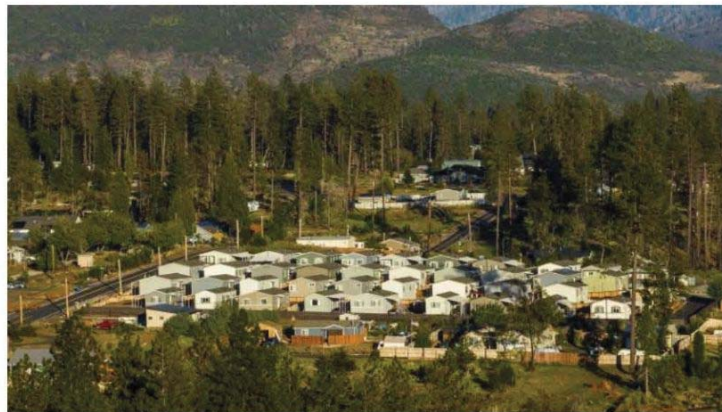
Beyond insurance considerations, the federal government has established several programs to support at-risk WUI communities, including:

- ***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

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 to 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 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”.

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.

⁵ 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>.

⁶ 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.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Wildfires and Acres*, NATIONAL INTERAGENCY FIRE CENTER (2025), <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² 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>.

¹³ Sara Sutherland et al., *PERC Wildfire Risk Map*, PERC (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://perc.org/2025/02/25/perc-wildfire-risk-map/>.

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ Sara Sutherland et al., *PERC Wildfire Risk Map*, PERC (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://perc.org/2025/02/25/perc-wildfire-risk-map/>.

¹⁶ See *Eaton Fire*, CAL FIRE (Apr. 3, 2025), <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025/17/eaton-fire>; Amber X. Chen, *Altadena Residents Question Why Evacuation Warnings Came So Late*, LOS ANGELES PUBLIC PRESS (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://lapubliexpress.org/2025/01/altadena-eaton-fire-evacuation-warning-notification/>.

¹⁷ *What is the WUI?*, U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION (June 8, 2022), <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui/>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ V.C. Radeloff et al., *The wildland-urban interface in the United States*, ECOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS (2005), <https://ressearch.fs.usda.gov/reesearch/14912>.

²⁰ *Fire Adapted Communities*, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/fac>.

²¹ *Id.*, *Fire-Resistant Construction in the Wildland-Urban Interface*, International Code Council, <https://www.iccsafe.org/products-and-services/wildland-urban-interface/>.

²² *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/>.

²³ *What is the WUI?*, U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION (June 8, 2022), <https://www.usfa.fema.gov/wui/what-is-the-wui/>.

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/>.

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_vosentite_081123.pdf.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

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-e9f3-538269379e87/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.*

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_s08.pdf.

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

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.

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

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).

⁷⁴ *Id.*

**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON FIX OUR FORESTS:
HOW IMPROVED MANAGEMENT CAN
PROTECT COMMUNITIES IN THE WILD-URBAN
INTERFACE**

**Thursday, May 15, 2025
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Paul Gosar [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Gosar, Boebert, Collins, Begich, Westerman; Dexter, Ansari, Hernández, and Huffman.

Also present: Representatives Crane, Fong, Fulcher, Hageman, and Kim.

Dr. GOSAR. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations has come to order.

Without objections, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on, “Fix Our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface.”

Under Committee rule 4(f), any oral opening statement at the hearing are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all the other members’ statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent the following members be allowed to sit and participate in today’s hearing: the gentlewoman from—the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Tiffany; the gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher; the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman; the gentleman from Utah, Mr. Kennedy; the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Crane; the gentleman from California, Mr. Fong; the gentlewoman from California, Mrs. Kim; and the gentleman from California, Mr. Calvert.

Without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize myself for my opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. PAUL GOSAR, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA**

Dr. GOSAR. Good morning, everyone. Thank you for our witnesses who came today to testify on this important issue on “Fix our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface.”

The Committee on Natural Resources and I have worked tirelessly to emphasize and combat the catastrophic wildfire crisis in the United States. I have long advocated for implementing sound, science-backed forest management policies, putting people back to work in our national forests, encouraging coordination between Federal, State, and private entities related to managing our forests, and to improve public safety, especially in the wildland-urban interface.

I will never forget the Yarnell Hill Fire, which tragically took the lives of 19 Granite Mountain hotshot firefighters, and remains Arizona's deadliest wildfire. The Yarnell Fire ignited on Federal BLM before burning more than 8,300 acres and destroying almost 100 homes in nearby neighborhoods. The public memorial I hosted brought together more than 1,200 members of the community, and the sacrifice each firefighter who was taken from us all too soon has undoubtedly stayed with all of us. We must not allow these tragedies that wildfires bring to wildland-urban interface communities to continue.

The relationship between forest management and wildfire crisis is clear. Across the U.S. more than one billion acres of land are at risk of being consumed by wildfire. Of those, approximately 117 million acres owned by the Federal Government has been identified as high or very high risk of burning.

And over the last 20 years wildfires in the United States have burned an average of 7 million acres per year. In 2024, almost 9 million acres burned. These numbers have multiplied significantly, even those from seen as recently as the early 2000s. And the reason why is not difficult to understand. Across the country, our Nation's forests are loaded with dangerous, dry fuels and have been not managed through the thinning, prescribed burns and mechanized treatments.

Hundreds of years ago, forests in the United States held about 64 acres per acre. Now, in many places, those same forests hold upwards of 300 trees per acre, allowing extreme environments to lock up our forests and make forests less resilient by increasing competition among trees and other vegetation for water, minerals, and sunlight crucial to sustained forest health.

To be clear, the catastrophic wildfire crisis does not only impact our forests. This crisis poses perhaps the most significant threat to communities situated in the wildland-urban interface. Wildfires cost between \$394 billion and \$893 billion every year. These costs include property damage, lost income, contamination of water resources, timber loss, and more.

Worse yet, these impacted home and business owners face significant challenge getting and keeping property insurance that covers the losses due to wildfire. We will talk about that today. As costs for both property owners and insurance carriers balloon, some carriers cannot ensure high-risk communities or properties, and those people who cannot obtain insurance often find their rates are astronomically increased so they are under-insured when they unfortunately must file a claim after experiencing a wildfire loss.

Only by putting out the fire, a more than century-long campaign by preservation activists who do not understand forest management can we reduce the impact of wildfires and allow our

forests to thrive. In fact, evidence of sound management policies work and can be seen in my home State of Arizona. For example, in 2024 alone, the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, which is a collaborative effort between Federal, State, and local stakeholders, has successfully treated more than 200,000 acres with beneficial fire and thinning. The project has not only helped lessen the impacts of catastrophic fire, but also simultaneously boosted forest and watershed health and helped sustain Arizona's timber industry.

Together we must do more to unlock these projects in other parts of Arizona and across the country. In 2013 I championed the Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act, which served to revamp the Federal Government's ability to partner with private industry and State foresters to manage and restore our wild lands and to cut the bureaucratic red tape that too often blocks implementing sound policy decisions.

This year I proudly voted alongside many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to pass the Fix Our Forests Act, which, among other things, streamlines the permitting process for critical forest management projects, continues to foster relationships among Federal, State, tribal, and local entities, and ends frivolous litigation that stands in the way of making communities in the wildland-urban interface more resilient to wildfire.

I challenge my colleagues in this room to think not only about these issues facing our forests and wildland interface communities, but also about the science-based solutions prevented by proactive forest management projects. These projects, coupled with community and home safety strategies, will both encourage insurers to cover at-risk residents more affordably and holistically and to help prevent devastating losses in the first place.

I look forward to a robust discussion today on how we can protect our wildland-urban interface communities and our forests through proper management. Thank you.

Dr. GOSAR. And I now recognize Ranking Member Dexter for her opening statements.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MAXINE DEXTER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OREGON

Dr. DEXTER. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Wildfire has always been a natural part of ecosystems across the country, helping to sustain biodiversity and forest health. But what we are facing now is different. Wildfires are burning hotter, faster, and more unpredictably than ever, putting lives and entire communities at risk.

This isn't an abstract problem; it is a crisis. And we know all too well this crisis in Oregon. We have seen entire neighborhoods reduced to ash, hazardous smoke choking our skies, and families forced to flee with nothing but what they could carry.

And it is not just the flames we have to worry about. A 2025 study found that between 2006 and 2020 smoke from climate-fueled wildfires was responsible for approximately 15,000 deaths in the United States. Vulnerable groups such as children, older

adults, pregnant people, and those who work outdoors are especially at risk.

The science is clear: climate change is driving this crisis. It is increasing average temperatures, drying out vegetation, extending fire seasons, and contributing to pest and disease outbreaks that weaken forest health and increase flammability. Nearly one-quarter of the contiguous United States is at moderate to very high risk of wildfire. This isn't just a Western problem. More than 1,100 communities across 32 states share wildfire risk characteristics with Los Angeles and other areas that have recently experienced devastating urban wildfires. In fact, one-third of all homes in the United States are in the wildland-urban interface, or WUI. These are places where homes and infrastructure meet undeveloped natural areas. That means millions of families are at risk, not just from wildfires themselves but also from toxic smoke, displacement, and economic devastation.

Some of the most catastrophic fire disasters in recent memory—the Pacific Palisades fire in California, the Lahaina Fire in Hawaii in 2023, the Marshall Fire in Colorado in 2021, and the Alameda Drive Fire in Oregon in 2020—all share key features: their triggers likely involved human activity, they occurred near developed areas, and they were fueled by extreme wind events. If we neglect the built environment, communities will continue to be vulnerable, regardless of how well we manage forests. We cannot keep repeating the same mistakes.

We need proactive solutions like zone zero policies that prohibit combustible materials such as brush, mulch, wooden fences, sheds, or outdoor furniture within five feet of structures. At the same time, we must encourage home-hardening techniques, including the use of fire-resistant roofing, ember-resistant vent and eave covers, and non-flammable exterior walls and siding.

Studies show that the cost of constructing a fire-resilient home is nearly the same as a conventional constructed home, yet widespread adoption of these practices has been impeded by bureaucracy, limited resources, weak enforcement, and misinformation.

The growing impact of urban wildfires is also disrupting the home insurance market. Between 2020 and 2023, homeowners saw insurance premiums increased by an average of 13 percent nationwide due to climate-related disasters. In California alone, 4 of the 5 most expensive wildfires on record occurred between 2018 and 2022, causing major insurers to stop issuing new home insurance policies in the state. A 2021 study found that applying ecological forestry practices to appropriate areas could lead to a 41 percent drop in residential insurance premiums, and save \$21 million per year in reduced insurance losses.

Science-based practices like prescribed burning, selective thinning, and maintaining strategic fuel breaks have also proven effective in lowering wildfire risk.

But we must also confront what doesn't work: policies that prioritize corporate profits over public safety, gut environmental protections, or ignore the root cause of these mega-fires. In March, President Trump issued two executive orders expanding commercial logging on public lands. Logging operations that often leave

behind flammable debris and remove large, fire-resistant trees are making forests more vulnerable to catastrophic fire, not less. Annually, less than 1 percent of wildfires intersect with Forest Service-treated fuel reduction zones, indicating that timber harvests are not an effective metric for saving our forests.

And let's be clear. The Trump administration's cut to wildfire prevention offices have also severely weakened our ability to prepare for and respond to fires. Hundreds of Federal firefighters were laid off in February. And some of them are hired back, but the broader loss of foresters, scientists, and natural resource managers mean we won't have the interdisciplinary workforce we need to fight wildfires.

We have many great things to discuss today. I am excited to hear some of the amazing, innovative ideas happening out there, but we must meet this moment. We need a comprehensive, science-based wildfire strategy.

Dr. DEXTER. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the Ranking Member. Now, the Chairman for the full Committee is now recognized.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, and I appreciate you holding this hearing today, a very important hearing. And thank you to our esteemed panel of witnesses. I think this is a topic that gets far too little attention, and we need to shine a light on the other side of what is happening in these devastating wildfires.

You know, just a few short months ago, the whole world watched in horror as raging infernos leveled entire neighborhoods in Los Angeles. These fires destroyed more than 16,200 buildings and caused \$131 billion in direct property damages. But these statistics only tell part of the story, and never can fully encapsulate the toll that devastating wildfires have on the thousands of families that are still trying to pick up the pieces and return to any semblance of normalcy. We cannot become numb to this level of destruction year after year. We can and we should do more. I would say we must do more.

As we sit here today and we think about those 16,200 homes that were destroyed, there are more than 44 million homes in the wildland-urban interface at risk of these kinds of wildfires across our country. This should be a top priority for every American, especially those out West, where the fires seem to be more frequent and of higher magnitude.

And the thing that we are going to talk about a lot today is how insurance rates are skyrocketing in fire-prone communities, and that is if folks are even able to buy policies in the first place. Just this week the State of California approved a 17 percent increase in State Farm insurance premiums due to wildfires on top of increases homeowners have already faced over the past few years.

There is a direct connection to lack of forest management and the cost of insurance in these communities. This problem is quite literally killing the American dream, making owning a home

unattainable for millions of families. Even worse, without insurance many folks affected by wildfires can't afford to rebuild their homes, meaning some communities will quite literally never look the same again.

The good news is that we know what needs to be done, and it requires using every tool at our disposal. This means hardening homes and infrastructure, creating more defensible space around communities, and treating our forests so they aren't tinderboxes ready to explode at the strike of a single match. That is why the bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act, which overwhelmingly passed the House earlier this year, comprehensively addresses this crisis by providing new tools and authorities to prevent wildfires at both a community and the landscape level.

Wildfire is fast and bureaucracy is slow. Take, for example, the Angeles National Forest which burned as part of the Eaton Fire. In 2020 Federal land managers wanted to install roughly 8,600 acres of fuel breaks, and began conducting an environmental assessment. Due to delays, the Forest Service eventually split this project into three separate categorical exclusions. After nearly 4 years of delays, these categorical exclusions were finally approved weeks after the Eaton Fire, too late to make a difference to the residents of Pasadena and Altadena.

Had FOFA both been in place in 2020, this project could have taken place under one 10,000-acre categorical exclusion. FOFA also codifies existing emergency authorities, shortening the time frame for action from 4 years to right now. We know that this works. Look no further than south Lake Tahoe, which was saved from certain destruction by forest management treatments that happened under a 10,000-acre categorical exclusion. Now we need to take that model and apply it nationwide.

As a forester, I can say that one of the favorite sayings of a forester is that the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second best time is today. The best time to have these authorities in place was years before the LA fires ever occurred, but the second best time is to enact these reforms now, so that communities in the future don't have to suffer the same consequences that we saw there in Southern California.

I really look forward to hearing the testimony today and continuing work in a bipartisan fashion with my colleagues to improve forest management and protect communities.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And with that I yield back the balance of my time.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from Arkansas. The gentleman from California, the Ranking Member for the whole Committee, Mr. Huffman, is recognized for his 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. JARED HUFFMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. HUFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our witnesses.

So when I heard that House Republicans were calling this hearing on wildfire preparedness and response, I was encouraged because I agree with the Chairman and others this is an important conversation. Catastrophic wildfires continue to tear through our

communities. Today fires are burning from Arizona to Minnesota, and it is early in the season. This Committee is the place for a serious, solutions-focused conversation about building wildfire resilience.

But I am disappointed that, once again, instead of confronting the full scope of the wildfire crisis, or focusing on the most pressing, science-based solutions and urgently-needed investments in the built environment so we can actually protect communities, we seem to be having yet another hearing on a bill that has already passed this Committee and already passed the House of Representatives.

Now, Fix Our Forests has some good stuff in it, I acknowledge that. It also had some bad things in it that didn't need to be there that were masquerading as fire solutions. But whether you think it is great or needs improvement, I don't think anyone seriously believes that it is the exhaustive and definitive statement of everything we need to do on this subject, but it seems to be the only thing that our friends across the aisle want to talk about.

Look, if we are going to address this crisis seriously, we need a full accounting of the threats and the tools to confront it, and that really starts at the top with an acknowledgment that wildfires are burning hotter and faster and longer because of climate change. We have got to acknowledge this reality. Fire professionals who I have met with who have fought fires all over the West, they don't dispute it. They don't think it is a hoax or a conspiracy theory. They know climate change is a reality. So let's acknowledge that and also maybe stop making it worse, as our Republican colleagues are trying to do with the fossil fuel bonanza in their reconciliation bill.

Look, fires are no longer just a problem for the West. Recent fires in Florida, Texas, and Arkansas are evidence that this has become a national crisis. Of course, we have fires in northern Minnesota burning today. Wildfires are also increasingly an urban issue, as the Ranking Member noted. Without major investments in home hardening and defensible spaces, communities will continue to be at risk no matter what we do in the back country, in the deep areas of our forests.

We can't address these problems if we are not willing to invest the necessary funding and resources too, and that is why I am encouraged that our colleagues in the Senate seem to be making some improvements in the Fix our Forests Act by incorporating many of these critical priorities that I am mentioning.

Now, that includes components of my Community Protection and Wildfire Resilience Act, which is a bipartisan bill that I was proud to recently reintroduce with Representative Obernolte in this Congress. It will help communities implement science-based wildfire mitigation strategies; provide crucial funding to design and implement new community protection and wildfire resilience plans with community members, first responders, and State agencies; and build on the investments that Democrats secured through the IJA and the IRA.

Now, these investments have allowed the Forest Service to do some very important things. They have hit record numbers for both hazardous fuel reductions and prescribed burns, increased the pace

and scale of forest health treatments, provided important resources to strengthen and empower our wildland firefighting workforce. We were moving in the right direction, but unfortunately this progress has come to a screeching halt under the Trump administration.

Experts and models tell us that we are headed into an especially active fire season, but Elon Musk and DOGE have been gutting the agencies responsible for keeping our communities safe from fire at a time when we need them the most. At least 700 dedicated public servants at the Forest Service who support Federal firefighting have been fired, and we know that more firings are coming. FEMA has lost a third of its full-time staff, including those specifically responsible for fire management, and Donald Trump has called for the elimination of FEMA entirely, which would eliminate the Federal recovery help that comes with this.

In a move that defies logic, the Administration has blocked funding for projects that prevent wildfires. With community welfare defense grants blocked, vital wildfire mitigation projects have been stopped, and that makes us more vulnerable. So I would hope that my Republican friends would want to do something about that, instead of spending all our time talking about a bill that has already passed this Committee and already passed the House. Wildfires are not partisan, but, unfortunately, our policies and our preparedness efforts too often seem to be. And that needs to change.

Mr. HUFFMAN. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. We are going to now going to go to our witnesses. I will introduce us, and then we will start.

So the first one is Mr. Dan Munsey, the Fire Chief and Fire Warden, San Bernardino County Fire Protection District, San Bernardino, California.

Next is Mr. Matt. Did I say that right?

Mr. WEINER. Yes.

Dr. GOSAR. CEO, Megafire Action, Los Angeles, California.

Mr. Neil Chapman, Wildfire and Fire Captain, Flagstaff Fire Department, Flagstaff, Arizona.

Thank you.

And Mr. Roy Wright, President and CEO, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, Richburg, South Carolina.

Let me remind the witnesses that, under Committee rules, you must limit your statement to 5 minutes, but your whole, entire statement will be placed in the record. So if you want to talk about something else, that is great.

To begin your testimony, you will see a green light go on. At 4 minutes will turn yellow, and then you wrap up when you see the red light.

So with that I now recognize Mr. Munsey for his 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DAN MUNSEY, FIRE CHIEF AND FIRE WARDEN, SAN BERNARDINO FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT, SAN BERNARDINO, CALIFORNIA

Mr. MUNSEY. Dr. Gosar, first, thank you for your comments on the Yarnell Fire, and specifically about recognizing the firefighters that lost their life while protecting our communities. My badge is shrouded, and since I know this will be congressional record I

would like to recognize Firefighter Ryan Spandrio, who recently passed from San Bernardino County Fire District, leaving behind a wife and two young children.

The lies we tell. I would like to start there first, that this Nation has a large wildfire problem, a wildland fire problem. I don't believe that the Nation has a large wildland fire, and that may be shocking, but let me explain. Our problem is that we have a wildland management problem. And if we manage our fuels, we won't have the fires that we see today. Wildfires are the byproduct of not effectively managing our wildland environment.

The second—I notice I am sitting next to Mr. Wright from the insurance industry, and we hear often about the fire insurance crisis. The number-one question that I get from—and thank you, Mr. Westerman, for your comments on this—the number-one question I get as a fire chief anymore is, “Chief, what are you doing to prevent this insurance crisis? I can't get insurance. I am on the California FAIR plan. That plan is not fair. It is very expensive.” At the end of the day, it is not an insurance crisis problem, it is a houses keep burning down problem. And so I appreciate your comments, Ms. Dexter, did I get your name right?

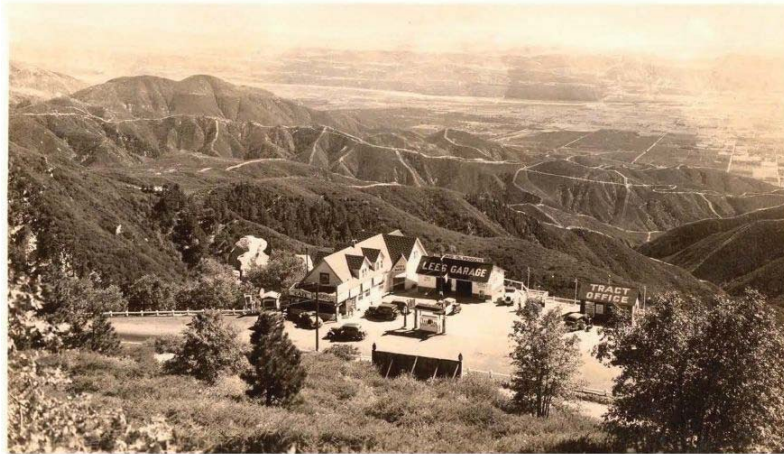
Dr. DEXTER. [Inaudible.]

Mr. MUNSEY. My apologies. My eyesight is not that good.

I appreciate your comments on the local responsibility of ensuring that we are protecting that built environment, but we really need to focus on why do these fires occur, and why do we keep losing houses.

A third lie that I think we tell is we keep referring to two large wildfires that occurred recently in Los Angeles, the Eaton Fire and the Palisades Fire. Make no mistake about it, there was a wildfire component to it, but this was house-to-house burning. These are houses that are burning because of failure from local government in making sure that our houses aren't going to burn down, and making sure that private properties are managing the land. Zone zero is very important to us in this built environment.

I have asked for several pictures to be brought up because I do want to talk about land management.



Mr. MUNSEY. This first picture I showed to a couple of congressional members recently, but specifically to LaMalfa. I asked him about those cars that are in the foreground. And he is a car enthusiast, and I asked him, "What year those cars?"

And he said, "Well, those are the 1930s. This is the San Bernardino National Forest in the 1930s."

And I said, "Well, sir, it is not about the cars in the foreground. Look at that hillside." And that hillside has strong control lines. Every ridge has a control line on it. There is good access. This is how we fought fires in the 1930s. This is why we kept it small.

Next picture, please.



Mr. MUNSEY. And this is 4 days ago, looking at that same area. There has been a species-type conversion because of bad management processes. There is no access into this area. There is

no control lines. When fires start, they are going to spread, and they are going to come to our communities.

Now I am going to shift the photo to the left. Next photo.



Mr. MUNSEY. That same prominent hill is now on the right side of the photo, but to the left you really can't see it in that valley. You will see some roads that are now there. That is all burned from the Line Fire. The Line Fire occurred this past August in San Bernardino. It burned 50,000 acres. We had to evacuate about 50,000 people. Those control lines were put in after the fact. It makes no sense to me that we have to go to the environment after a fire to make access, or during the fire to put these control lines. Why aren't we proactively managing?

We speak often of the Eaton Fire, and the Eaton Fire was bad. But that same year the Bridge Fire burned. It burned from Los Angeles, came in to San Bernardino, threatened two of our communities, Mount Baldy and the community of Wrightwood.

Referring to photo on the left.



Referring to photo on the right.



Mr. MUNSEY. The photo on the left shows what good management looks like. This is a shaded fuel break. The fire on the right, now, the fire burned 34,000 acres in 1 day. The Bridge Fire burned. But as it reached this area that had been treated, it went to the ground, and firefighters were able to pick this up with a couple of scratch lights, a couple of hand lines, but it allowed us to control that fire.

Next slide, please.



Mr. MUNSEY. This is the bark beetle kill from 2003 in the San Bernardino National Forest.

The final thing I want to make is that, as we move through the regulatory environment, we lack leadership. There is Federal agencies, there is overlay agencies like the EPA department, Corps of Engineers. There is State and local government. The way we were able to mitigate this is by our local government taking actions and bringing these parties together. We removed 1 million trees, millions of pounds of biomass to remove these trees. The Federal Government needs one person in charge of land management instead of us having to go through very difficult regulatory practices. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Munsey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DANIEL R. MUNSEY, MPA, EFO, CFO FIRE CHIEF/FIRE WARDEN, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

This nation does not have a wildland fire problem. It has a wildland management leadership problem.

My name is Dan Munsey. I am the Fire Chief and Fire Warden for the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District. This written testimony is submitted in response to the invitation to testify before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, regarding the hearing titled, "Fix Our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland Urban Interface."

I have over 29 years of experience in the fire service. For the past five years, I have served as the Fire Chief of the largest fire district in the United States. I am a director on FIRESCOPE, a board that provides recommendations and technical assistance to the fire service, including oversight of the FIRESCOPE Incident Command System (ICS) and the Multi-Agency Coordination System. I currently serve as President of the California Metro Chiefs Association, which includes some of the largest fire agencies in the nation. For the past five years, I also served as Chairperson of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) Technology Council. The IAFC represents the leadership of 1.1 million firefighters across the country.

San Bernardino is the largest county in the continental United States, covering more than 20,000 square miles—larger than New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island combined. The county encompasses diverse geography, including

coastal valleys, mountainous terrain, and vast desert regions. San Bernardino County is home to two of the most visited and populated national forests: the San Bernardino National Forest and a portion of the Angeles National Forest. Nearly 80% of the county's landmass is public land, with federal land accounting for the vast majority. We serve 2.2 million residents across 66 communities, many of which are isolated and surrounded by federal land in both mountain and desert regions. This means that San Bernardino County Fire frequently responds to all-hazard emergencies originating on federal lands—and likewise, federal lands are often impacted by emergencies that originate in our local jurisdiction.

I want to thank Chairman Gosar and the members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to share my testimony on what I believe is the root cause of today's uncontrollable wildfires.

Despite what some recent headlines may suggest, the primary issue is not a lack of water supply, hot and dry weather, climate change, steep terrain, negligent utilities, or even arson. These are contributing factors—but the root problem is land management. Simply put, this nation does not have a wildland fire problem; it has a land management problem. If we fail to manage our public and private lands proactively, wildfires will continue to be the inevitable and devastating result.

Last year, San Bernardino County experienced two major wildfires burning simultaneously and threatening our communities: the Line Fire (43,978 acres) and the Bridge Fire (56,030 acres).

Both fires provide compelling case studies on how communities in the wildland urban interface can either be protected—or left vulnerable—depending on how the surrounding land is managed

Land Ownership/Fuel Treatment Responsibility

Understanding land “ownership” is critical to the discussion of land management. Ownership can be divided into four primary categories: federal, state, tribal, and local jurisdictions. Each of these jurisdictions operates under different laws, ordinances, and policies. Often, the boundaries of these ownership areas are intermixed in a checkerboard-like pattern across the landscape, further complicating land management.

Adding to this complexity, multiple federal agencies may have authority over different sections of land. These may include the United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), among others. Even within federal land management, inconsistency arises—one forest supervisor may interpret environmental policies more strictly than another, and these individuals often have broad discretion in decision-making.

Additionally, overlapping regulatory agencies such as the Air Quality Management Districts (AQMD), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) may also influence land management decisions. Federal protections for endangered species or habitats can overlay federal, state, and even private lands, adding another layer of regulatory complexity.

At a macro level, the theory behind land management is not difficult. It requires a coordinated application of six key elements:

1. Vegetation management and fuel reduction
2. Land use planning
3. Fire-resistant building practices
4. Management of forest and ecosystem health (as healthier forests tend to be more fire-resistant)
5. Ensuring access
6. Emergency planning and community education

If any one of these six components is weak or missing, the likelihood of large, uncontrollable wildfires increases significantly.

Effective land management must be approached holistically, transcending jurisdictional boundaries. Threats and hazards must be assessed without regard to political lines in order to determine true risk. If any government entity fails to uphold its land management responsibilities, it becomes nearly impossible to adequately protect communities in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

One of the most significant challenges we face is that no single agency holds authority over all land management efforts. Each entity often operates independently, and there is no clear lead agency responsible for aligning cohesive land management strategies. In practice, this responsibility frequently falls to local

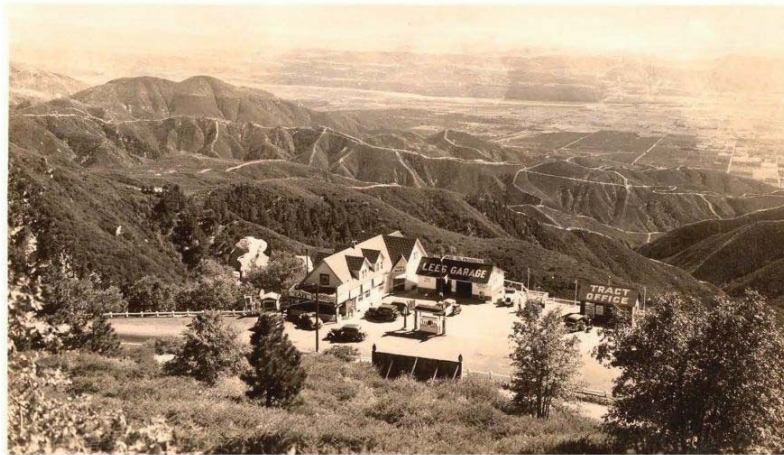
governments—who typically own the least amount of wildland—to coordinate disparate agencies, reconcile conflicting policies, and drive unified action toward shared land management goals.

Ensuring Access and Fuel Breaks

In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) created fire breaks and roads throughout the San Bernardino National Forest (SBNF) using bulldozers, other types of heavy equipment, and hand tools. The CCC's efforts in the SBNF were based on the understanding that fire breaks and rapid access to wildfires would help limit fire spread.

The photograph on the next page (Figure 1) provides an example of the scope of this work during the 1930s. It was taken from Highway 18 at what is now called the “Donald S. Wieman Vista Point,” sometime in the late 1930s. Notably, it shows a wide network of access roads and fire breaks that were constructed to help contain wildfires and allow firefighters quick access to fire areas.

Figure 1. A view of the San Bernardino National Forest from the 1930's showing robust fuel breaks and access roads.



The next picture (Figure 2) was taken on May 9, 2025, from Donald S. Wieman Vista Point, showing the same geographical area.

Note the absence of fire breaks and access roads. This reflects a broader issue seen throughout much of the San Bernardino National Forest and many other forests across the nation. The lack of road maintenance hampers firefighter access, and the absence of fuel breaks allows fires to spread more rapidly and extensively.

When faced with access challenges, firefighters may be forced to use helicopters (if available), hike into fire zones, rely on mule or horse trains, or wait for heavy equipment to improve or construct fire access roads.

Rather than using pre-existing control lines—like those visible in the 1930s image above—firefighters today often must rely on natural barriers such as rock outcroppings, lakes, rivers, or barren terrain. Alternatively, they must create new control lines using heavy machinery or hand tools to contain and control the fire.

It is important to understand that fires occurring in federal lands can grow significantly before any fire suppression action is taken. A local government fire agency has a legal duty to respond immediately to fire calls for service within its jurisdiction. The federal government, on the other hand, is not always required to immediately respond to a wildfire on its land.

This delay is often due to environmental or policy considerations that require a fire management team to conduct an environmental analysis, consider endangered species protections, or wait for specialized resources. During this time, a fire may grow significantly, especially in remote or rugged terrain. In contrast, local agencies are often restricted from entering federal lands for fire suppression unless a delegation of authority is issued, or unless specific agreements are in place.

This difference in response times, authorities, and policies between local and federal agencies contributes to the challenge of effectively managing wildfires—particularly when those fires cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Figure 2. The same view as the picture above today showing a lack of fire access roads and fuel breaks.



The next picture (Figure 3) was taken from the same location as the previous two photos, with the view shifted slightly to the northeast. The prominent hillside visible in the earlier images now appears near the center-right of the frame. The Line Fire, which occurred in September 2024, burned 43,978 acres before it was contained using natural rock drainages, Highway 330, constructed control lines, and a shaded fuel break south of Big Bear Lake, California.

From the peak of the hillside extending toward the left side of the image, the entire area has been completely burned. Clearly visible in the photograph is a network of bulldozer-constructed control lines that were built as the fire advanced.

Figure 3. The Line Fire burn scar showing newly constructed bulldozer control lines.



In 2018, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13855, which promoted the active management of forests to reduce wildfire risks. The executive order stated: “Active management of vegetation is needed to treat these dangerous conditions on Federal lands but is often delayed due to challenges associated with regulatory analysis and current consultation requirements.” It further emphasized the need to reduce regulatory obstacles to fuel reduction in forests, particularly those created by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The concept of actively managing forests to mitigate wildfire risk is not new—it was a widespread practice throughout much of the previous century.

As a firefighter, I often question why we wait for wildfire destruction before taking action. It’s difficult not to ask why roads and fuel breaks that were created a century ago can no longer be maintained due to environmental concerns. Instead, we wait for a fire to occur, watch it devastate the environment, and only then do we construct fire access roads and control lines.

Modern Fuel Treatment Methods

While clear-cut fuel breaks are effective in fire control, many other tools are available for fuel treatment. Numerous publications demonstrate the effectiveness of fuel treatment in reducing wildfire intensity after an active fire. Areas that have been treated with fuel management strategies generally aim to keep fires at a lower intensity and prevent them from reaching tree canopies, thus allowing firefighters to establish control lines and halt fire growth.

Mastication—Mastication is a mechanical fuel treatment that alters the structure and size of fuels. Brush and understory vegetation are ground up or chipped, and the resulting byproduct is left on the ground.

Cut and Lay/Cut and Chip—Small trees and brush are cut and either laid on the ground (for later prescribed burns) or cut and chipped, with the material spread back onto the landscape.

Cut, Pile, and Burn—Small trees and brush are cut, then piled for later burning.

Prescribed Fire/Controlled Burns—This involves carefully preparing and planning an area for a low-intensity ground fire.

The Bridge Fire, which occurred in August 2025, burned over 34,000 acres in a single day. However, when the explosive fire reached fuel treatment areas, it quickly transitioned to a lower intensity, allowing firefighters to gain control of the fire front.

Figure 4. After hand thinning and chipping. Looking downhill from Table Mountain Turnout 5/3/2023.



Figure 5. The Bridge Fire burns through the treatment with low intensity. Looking downhill from Table Mountain Turnout 9/11/2024.



Maintenance of Existing Fuel Treatment and Fire Breaks

It is common for fuel treatment projects and fire breaks to be constructed without a plan for ongoing maintenance. As vegetation regrows, the effectiveness of these treatments diminishes over time. The reasons for this lack of maintenance are often related to ongoing funding issues or changing environmental regulations. Each project should identify future sources of funding to ensure continued maintenance and effectiveness.

Timber Removal

Local government fire services have the most at stake when it comes to wildland fires destroying homes and businesses. While environmental protections must not be ignored, we must also prioritize the protection of the “human habitat.” Most homes at risk are not located on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) property; they are on private property within the boundaries of the first-in response jurisdiction of local governments.

Over the years, the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District (Fire District) has taken a unique approach to mitigating fire danger on private property to protect both public lands and vice versa. In 2003, during a severe bark beetle tree mortality crisis (Figure 5), the Fire District collaborated with the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on private property projects. This collaboration helped streamline environmental review and ensure compliance with both federal and state environmental protection agencies. By cutting through red tape and accelerating project start dates, the effort resulted in the removal of over 1.1 million dead trees through more than 1,000 forestry projects.

Figure 5. Bark Beetle Infestation in San Bernardino National Forest (Circa 2003)



This was accomplished by the Fire District leading an interagency, multi-level cooperative task force—including CalTrans, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), CAL FIRE, Southern California Edison, the County of San Bernardino, environmental groups, and Fire Safe Councils—to reduce hazardous timber and unmanaged fuels within forested areas, regardless of jurisdiction. This leadership and collaboration significantly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of multiple government agencies.

Our Fire District partnered with the San Bernardino County Public Works Department to develop and manage agreements and contracts with private logging companies. These efforts led to substantial improvements in forest conditions by removing unmanaged vegetation that increased wildfire risk. From 2003 to 2010, the Fire District oversaw more than 1,000 forestry projects, resulting in the removal of over 1 million dead trees and millions of tons of biomass.

Lack of Technology Implementation into Processes

Permitting processes are complex. Even relatively simple land management projects often require 4 to 6 weeks to move through various agency approvals.

Given modern geographic information systems (GIS), published rules and guidelines, and advancements in automated workflow management, why can't permitting processes be automated?

In local government, “one-stop shops” exist to streamline permitting and approvals. In the field of wildland management, however, no such centralized system exists. Each agency operates independently and follows lengthy, siloed approval processes.

Technology—especially GIS—has the capability to identify land ownership, zoning, air quality standards, water impact considerations, and protected species concerns. Algorithms can be used to review submissions for completeness and flag potential hazards and risks. Dashboards can display project proposals, enhance public communication, provide real-time updates, and track permit progress. Field inspections can be conducted virtually or used to augment inspectors' documentation and verification efforts.

Closing

In closing, we must stop waiting for wildfire to destroy our communities before taking action. There are three critical improvements needed—central to the goal of improving land management to protect communities in the Wildland Urban Interface—that require congressional attention:

1. **Clear Leadership:** Establish a single entity or individual with the authority to oversee and coordinate all federal land management and agency efforts.
2. **Consistency in Decision-Making:** Land management decisions must be centralized. Allowing individuals to apply their own interpretations of policy introduces inconsistency and bias.
3. **Leverage Technology:** Use technology to minimize human bias, increase efficiency, enhance agility, and enable effective, data-driven land management.

Roads and fuel breaks that were effective a century ago can be effective again—if we commit to proactive land management. The solution to our wildfire crisis is not new. It lies in restoring and modernizing proven practices, embracing technology to streamline processes, and ensuring collaboration among federal, state, and local leaders. Through unified leadership and simplified, smart systems, we can reduce the threat of wildfire and better protect our communities.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Munsey.
I now recognize Mr. Wright for his 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROY WRIGHT, PRESIDENT AND CEO, INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR BUSINESS AND HOME SAFETY, RICHBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

Mr. WRIGHT. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, Chairman Westerman, and Ranking Member Huffman, and all the members of the Committee. Thank you for opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Roy Wright, and I lead the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety.

Supported by investments from the property insurance industry, IBHS is a research organization dedicated to making homes, businesses, and communities safer from the impacts of severe weather and disasters. Our goal: make American homes and communities more survivable and insurable. Survivable, I mean homes and communities that can endure the severe weather events that we know are coming, allowing families to return to normal life more quickly. And by insurable I mean simply homes and communities that carriers want to insure, not through guarantees but by making them more attractive risk through smart mitigation.

Over the past decade, wildfire has become one of the critical perils we study at the IBHS Research Center. Our facility has the unique ability to pummel full-sized buildings and components to realistic thermal exposure of flames, as well as flying embers. This capability has given us new insights into the vulnerabilities of homes to embers, flames, and heat of wildfire, as well as the dynamics of building-to-building fire spread we see in the context of urban conflagrations.

Our focus at IBHS is on that transition of fire from the wildlands into developed neighborhoods. These dynamics were on full display earlier this year during the Los Angeles County fires. They grimly remind us of what can occur when fire, wind, and our neighborhoods come together without the right mitigation and actions in place.

The needed actions, though, are not complicated. To reduce the risk of home ignition from embers, homeowners need a class A roof, use ember-resistant vents for attics and crawl spaces, and must clear combustible material five feet away from around the home. To reduce the risk of ignitions from flame and radiant heat, we look to the building material choices like windows, doors, siding, and decking. And at the neighborhood scale, focus on the spacing between structures and the removal of the connective fuels. These are essential to prevent fire from moving from one home to another.

These mitigation elements form the foundation of IBHS's Wildfire Prepared Program, which offers solutions at the home and neighborhood scale. A compelling example of this approach is the Dixon Trail community near San Diego. Developed by KB Home, all 64 homes in this new neighborhood are being built to our wildfire Prepared Home Plus standard. The development also incorporates neighborhood-scale risk reduction strategies. These actions require almost cost-neutral choices in the building materials. For KB, the homes are easier to insure, and therefore easier to sell. We need more neighborhoods like Dixon Trail, and fewer communities that face the difficult journey of recovering and rebuilding.

Just as mitigation actions to reduce property level wildfire risk must be undertaken collectively, so too must the actions of Federal, State, and local policymakers to assist homeowners. We see four key policy pathways.

One: address the fuel loads in the wildland. Across Federal, State, and private lands, narrow the pathways of destruction.

Two: appropriately tailored financial incentives and support mechanisms that can help homeowners invest in meaningful wildfire resilience. Tax incentives, grant programs, and disaster savings accounts can all help. The bipartisan Fix Our Forests Act, already passed by the House, would establish a community wildfire risk reduction program to help communities prepare for fire and harden structures against wildfire.

Three: consistent messaging about wildfire risk reduction, especially the critical actions about removing all that is flammable within five feet up next to the structures. We need to educate homeowners, business owners, and communities.

And fourth: something that is quintessentially at the State and local level, stronger codes and standards for building a defensible space. They play a very critical role.

We know how to make our homes and communities more survivable and insurable. Translating this knowledge into action requires policies that drive consumer behavior, incentivize resilient retrofits, and catalyze the innovation in mind of the private sector.

We appreciate the opportunity to share some of these ideas with you today, and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wright follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROY E. WRIGHT, PRESIDENT & CEO, INSURANCE INSTITUTE
FOR BUSINESS & HOME SAFETY (IBHS)

Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the importance of strengthening the survivability and insurability of homes across regions impacted by wildfires. My name is Roy Wright, and I am President & CEO of the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS). IBHS is a 501(c)(3) organization enabled by the property insurance industry's investment to conduct building safety research that leads to real-world solutions for home and business owners, helping to create more resilient communities.

Severe weather disrupts lives, displaces families, and drives financial loss. IBHS delivers top-tier research and translates it into action so we can prevent avoidable suffering, strengthen our homes and businesses, inform the insurance industry, and support thriving communities. The perils we study at IBHS are part of the natural world in which we live, but social and economic disasters occur when these perils meet human populations that live or work in harm's way.

To break the cycle of destruction, it is essential to address all aspects of the building performance chain: where you build, how you design and construct, and how well you maintain and repair. As a building science institute, IBHS focuses on the ways severe weather behaves, what makes homes and businesses vulnerable, and how our buildings can be more resilient. We exist to help ensure the places where people live, learn, work, worship, and gather are safe, stable, and as strong as the best research can equip them to be.

We put building science to practical use, providing homeowners, businesses, communities, and policymakers with disaster mitigation solutions that are achievable, affordable, and effective.

In doing so, we have a primary goal in mind: **make American homes and communities more survivable and insurable.**

- Survivable means homes and communities that can withstand the severe weather we know they will face, so that homeowners can return home after an evacuation and get on with their lives. It provides families with physical safety and economic security and supports strong communities, stable tax bases, and healthy insurance markets.
- Insurable means homes and communities that carriers want to insure because they have undertaken meaningful, verified risk reduction. It is not a guarantee of insurance from a particular carrier—but rather a risk that is more attractive to insurers.

Wildfires have long been part of the American landscape. However, in recent years they have become more frequent and intense, often spreading into densely populated suburban neighborhoods where the economic losses and human suffering are significant. This year, the Eaton and Palisades Fires—the second and third most destructive wildfires in California history—demonstrated the devastating impact of wildfires when they reach into our communities and become urban conflagrations.

And yet, we understand how to reduce the risk of home ignitions and neighborhood conflagrations—how to make our families and communities stronger and safer when smoke fills the air.

Today, I would like to speak to you about what we know about wildfire risk and resilience and the actions that need to be taken by individuals, the public sector, and the private sector to reduce risk for homes and communities. To start, I want to highlight three key points:

1. Solutions to reduce wildfire risk for homes and communities are known. Homeowners and neighborhoods can act—right now—to reduce the likelihood that their homes will burn when embers, flames and radiant heat threaten their communities.
2. We must address communities as fuel sources that must be mitigated, as much or more than the surrounding natural environment. This requires engagement from federal, state, and local wildfire government—and the heaviest lifting will occur at the state and local level.
3. The private sector also must play a role in reducing wildfire risk, particularly the building industry and financial services sector.

Let me underscore my first point: we are not powerless.

Strengthening our resilience to wildfire is among the most pressing challenges faced by too many American families, but solutions are within our reach.

The State of Wildfire Science

Wildfire is one of the most important perils we study at the IBHS Research Center. Our facility is the only place besides real-world wildfire events that can expose full-scale buildings and building components to realistic thermal exposure of flames and embers. Our researchers meticulously recreate realistic wildfire scenarios to better understand the interaction of embers, wind, and the built environment. This lab-based work is then extended through field-based, post-event investigations. IBHS not only funds and leads these research endeavors, IBHS also partners with other wildfire science leaders—the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the USFS’s Rocky Mountain Research Station/Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory, and NIST’s Fire Research Division.

In the last decade, our research has covered topics including structure-to-structure fire spread, ember characteristics, decking, vents, fire-retardant coatings and gels, and the home ignition (0–5 foot) zone around structures. *It’s about solutions, not just studying the problem.*

Based on this research, we now understand the behavior of wildfire around the built environment far better than we did 10 years ago. Generally, wildfire causes damage to homes through three channels: embers, flames, and radiant heat. Of these, it is the embers that cause most damage to homes and communities. Embers can be carried aloft by wind for a mile or more, bringing a wildfire well outside the predictable path of the flames. These embers are responsible for most home ignitions caused by wildfires. And once a home ignites, it will be a complete loss 90 percent of the time. These findings have taught us that wildfires are essentially a home ignition problem, and that embers are the primary driver of these ignitions. By finding ways to reduce the likelihood an ember ignites a home, we can meaningfully reduce that home’s wildfire risk.

And yet, wildfire risk extends well beyond the initial ignition of homes. We know that mitigating wildfire risk requires actions undertaken at the property level and actions undertaken at the neighborhood level.

Today, we have a significantly better understanding of the community dynamics of wildfire risk than we did just three years ago. When they enter neighborhoods, wildfires can become urban conflagrations—characterized by uncontrollable structure-to-structure fire spread. This can occur extremely quickly. According to CAL FIRE incident data, the Eaton Fire reached approximately 76 percent of its final size within 16 hours of ignition and 98 percent of its final size within 46 hours, indicating extremely rapid growth.

The three factors that play the largest role in urban conflagrations are structure spacing, connective fuels, and building materials.

- **Structure separation.** Based on lab experimentation and post-disaster observations, we know that homes that are within ten feet of each other are at extremely high risk of fire spread. At that distance, fire spread along the wind direction is a given absent intervention by fire services. Homes spaced at least 20 feet apart create an opportunity for parcel-level mitigation measures to be effective.
- **Connective fuels.** Whether manmade (fences, vehicles, hoses, trashcans) or vegetative (hedges, bushes, etc.)—create avoidable pathways for fire to spread from property to property and home to home, even under non-extreme conditions.
- **Building materials.** When homes have sufficient structural separation and connective fuels are removed, non-combustible building materials are better able to withstand wildfires.

By pairing parcel-level wildfire mitigation with attention to these conflagration—enhancing factors, we can transform our neighborhoods from dense fuel sources to protective fuel breaks. We cannot stop the damage from wildfire entirely, but we can narrow the path of damage.

Wildfire Prepared: A Solution for Homeowners and Communities

Although American homeowners and communities remain vulnerable, we are not powerless. Solutions to make homes better able to withstand wildfires are known and available. IBHS has translated years of research into its Wildfire Prepared program to provide homeowners and communities **clear, achievable pathways to strengthen their survivability and insurability.**

Wildfire Prepared is a voluntary designation program designed to reduce the risk of home ignitions and the uncontrollable building-to-building fire spread associated with urban and suburban conflagration.

- **Wildfire Prepared Home** provides a system of mitigation actions that collectively reduce the risk of ignition from embers. It includes a Class A roof, flame—and ember-resistant vents, and—critically—a noncombustible five-foot area (Zone 0) around the structure.
- **Wildfire Prepared Home Plus** provides an additional set of mitigation actions, including building material choices, such as ignition resistant siding and dual-paned, tempered glass windows, to reduce the risk of ignition from radiant heat and direct flames.
- **Wildfire Prepared Neighborhood** provides a community scale approach to reduce the risk of urban conflagration by eliminating pathways of connective fuels, maintaining appropriate minimum separation between structures, and requiring individual accountability for risk reduction at the parcel level.

Featuring independent verification processes that ensure IBHS's science-based disaster mitigation solutions have been correctly applied, *Wildfire Prepared* provides a bridge to the property insurance industry. This helps property owners differentiate themselves from others, enhance their insurability, and in some cases, obtain insurance price considerations.

Currently available in California and Oregon, we expect that *Wildfire Prepared* will soon be available in other wildfire-prone states.

Living with Wildfire: The Role of Government

In California and beyond, more communities than ever are at risk of wildfires. Per a 2022 FEMA *report*, nearly 99 million Americans, one-third of our nation, live in areas considered the Wildland Urban Interface—the area where homes and communities intermingle with the undeveloped wildlands and vegetative fuels of the natural environment. A *study* from 2020 found that approximately 60 million homes in the U.S. are within an area that has already burned or are within a kilometer of previous fire. In light of the wildfires that have occurred in the last five years, this figure is surely higher today.

These startling statistics do not even fully capture the actual risk wildfire poses to people's homes and communities, given what we know about the behavior of wildfire. As I referenced earlier, embers can fly a mile or further ahead of the flames of a wildfire. As these embers land and ignite, they create more embers that winds carry even further ahead. What this means: more Americans than ever are moving into areas of known high wildfire risk, while wildfire risk encroaches outward.

Unlike any other natural peril, wildfires are strengthened when they reach the built environment. Buildings are literally fuel for the fire, meaning that our homes are not just at risk from wildfire, they contribute to its spread. In our post-disaster investigation of Colorado's December 2021 Marshall Fire, we saw a grassland fire turn into a suburban conflagration when it reached neighborhoods: it was flames and embers from burning homes—not from grasslands—that caused much of the destruction.

What this means: investing in wildfire risk reduction for our homes and communities is not only about protecting the vulnerable—it is about controlling the severity and scope of wildfires.

Thus, our policy response must include making the built environment more resilient to wildfire. Wildfire resilience requires policy responses that recognize the complex interaction of the built environment and the natural environment. The federal government invests considerable resources into wildfire response and recovery—and most of these funds go to wildfire response and forest management. We also must manage the fuels created by our built environment.

The *Fix Our Forests Act*, already passed by the House of Representatives, strikes this balance. The bill is aligned with several major issues identified by the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission, such as the need to expand and speed wildfire risk reduction efforts on public lands and built environments, improve delivery of decision support and modelling tools to fire practitioners, and improve post fire recovery.

Critically, the bill would establish a Community Wildfire Risk Reduction program to help communities prepare for fire and harden structures against wildfires. This program would advance research and science, support local adoption of codes and standards, support local efforts to address wildfire impacts, including property damage as well as air and water quality, encourage public-private partnerships for

fuel reduction, and provide technical and financial assistance to communities. It also would create a one-stop grant portal for certain wildfire funding from USDA, DOI, and FEMA—making the process of accessing federal resources easier for state and local communities.

Just as the mitigation actions to reduce property level wildfire risk must be undertaken collectively, so too must the actions of federal, state, and local policymakers to assist homeowners to achieve a higher degree of resilience. Three essential public policy lanes for reducing wildfire risk are:

- Stronger codes and standards for building and defensible space;
- Appropriately tailored financial incentives and support mechanisms to help homeowners invest in meaningful wildfire resilience; and
- Public education and consistent messaging about wildfire risk reduction—especially critical mitigation actions like removing anything combustible from the five feet around the home.

It is important to note that while the federal government can play a supporting role in each of these policy lanes, the role of state and local governments is more direct and essential than that of the federal departments and agencies. Recovery from the Los Angeles County Wildfires provides an important example. The Palisades Fire occurred in an area of California that is considered at “very high” risk of wildfire and, as such, is subject to California Building Chapter 7A (which contains its wildfire code provisions). The Eaton Fire, in contrast, affected the Altadena community, most of which is not mapped as “very high” wildfire risk and is not subject to Chapter 7A. As such, the two areas within Los Angeles County will be rebuilt very differently, unless the County acts to expand the application of Chapter 7A to the entirety of the Eaton Fire burn perimeter.

Likewise, financial incentives and financial support programs, like grants, are best planned and administered at the state and local level. While public education and messaging from federal sources is important, most homeowners will be more receptive to voices in their own community—highlighting the crucial role of the fire services in providing good information on wildfire resilience.

Stronger codes and standards

A 2021 study found homes that meet wildfire codes *were 40% less likely to be destroyed*, compared to older homes. Unfortunately, while codes and standards for wildfire resilience have existed and evolved for decades, the adoption rates for wildfire codes and standards are even lower than the shamefully low adoption rates for modern versions of the International Residential Code, and far more sporadic in their usage. To strengthen the resilience of vulnerable homes and communities, adoption and enforcement of wildfire codes and standards must increase.

In the absence of state action, or in addition to it, municipal and county ordinances can enact and enforce wildfire resilience measures. For example, California has yet to create statewide defensible space requirements for Zone 0—the five feet closest to a structure—despite a statutory requirement to do so. In the absence of state actions, local jurisdictions like the County of San Diego and the City of Berkeley have adopted Zone 0 ordinances that prohibit combustible material from this critical area.

Appropriately tailored financial incentives and support mechanisms

As with other natural perils, financial incentives can help provide needed nudges to encourage wildfire resilience investments, and more significant financial mechanisms may be necessary to help low—and moderate-income homeowners mitigate their risk. Actions at the federal, state and local level can provide these financial mechanisms to spur resilience-enhancing actions by homeowners. Congress can play a role—by providing financial incentives, such as tax credits or tax advantaged disaster savings accounts, that provide additional nudges homeowners may need to invest in the mitigation actions that will protect themselves and their neighbors.

However, some people need more than a nudge—they need financial support to undertake mitigation actions that they cannot otherwise afford. For these individuals, mitigation grant programs can mean the difference between resilience and ignition when embers fly. For example, the California Office of Emergency Services and CAL FIRE have stood up a mitigation program that will help homeowners take necessary structural and defensible space actions on their properties. Earlier this year, New Mexico enacted legislation to create its own wildfire mitigation grant program.

Congress can help reduce the tax burden of state mitigation grants and encourage homeowners to save for retrofit projects. The bipartisan Disaster Mitigation and Tax

Parity Act of 2025 would address a longtime quirk of the tax code that treats state mitigation grants as federal income. This would give homeowners the full benefit of state mitigation grants, rather than transferring funds from state to federal coffers, using at-risk homeowners as a go-between.

Public education and consistent messaging

As more states and communities confront wildfire risk, a multitude of public, non—profit, and for-profit programs have sprung up in response. In any given community, a homeowner may hear messaging about wildfire from the local fire department, a wildfire prevention authority, town and county leaders, a neighborhood Firewise USA community, a local Fire Safe Council, their insurance company, nightly news reports, and advertisements from wildfire mitigation services companies. Even with the best of intentions, the signal can be lost in all this noise, particularly when the messages from these sources emphasize different things.

IBHS is not solely a research institute; we also put a strong emphasis on risk communications because we understand that our science is only as good as people’s ability to understand it and act. We strongly encourage federal, state, and local policymakers to coalesce around a science-driven set of recommendations—the mitigations that matter—for wildfire resilience. A common message across multiple stakeholders will simplify and amplify the signal to homeowners, giving them clear guidance as well as a measure of hope.

Living with Wildfire: The Role of the Private Sector

Large scale change requires the private sector to invest in survivable and insurable homes and communities based on a clear value proposition. Key players include the building industry, the financial services sector, and the insurance industry.

Voluntary take-up of IBHS standards by major builders would have a market-moving effect on the construction of new homes across the United States. Initial movement in this direction is starting to occur. Last month, IBHS and KB Home celebrated the opening of *Dixon Trail*, a new community outside of San Diego that is being built to IBHS’s Wildfire Prepared Neighborhood standard. Every home in the 64-house neighborhood will obtain a Wildfire Prepared Home Plus designation.

Executives at KB Home decided to apply Wildfire Prepared to building Dixon Trail after viewing a 2024 demonstration IBHS conducted in California that showed the effectiveness of wildfire mitigation actions. The demonstration sparked their interest, but it was the business case that drove the decision.

Making new homes more survivable and insurable required relatively inexpensive changes and choices in building materials. Given the wildfire risk outside of San Diego, homes with verifiable risk reduction are easier to insure and, therefore, easier to sell.

Building a Wildfire Prepared Neighborhood was better for the safety of the community. Better for their customers. And better for business.

The financial services sector also has a role to play by providing financing options that incentivize the construction and purchase of survivable and insurable buildings. A 2022 study from IBHS and CoreLogic (now Cotality) concluded that homes built to modern building codes were less likely to go into delinquency following hurricanes, demonstrating the linkage between the physical risk to structures and the credit risk of borrowers. Further analysis and application could create financial products that incentivize risk reduction through solutions like Wildfire Prepared.

In closing, I would like to thank you for recognizing the importance of wildfire mitigation for both resilient communities and healthy insurance markets, and the critical role of IBHS research to strengthen the survivability and insurability of American homes and communities.

Americans are not powerless against wildfires—it is possible to take actions today to meaningfully reduce the risk that one’s home will ignite and burn. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of our ideas with you today.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Wright, and now I recognize Mr. Chapman from Flagstaff.

I would like to hear your 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF NEIL CHAPMAN, WILDLAND FIRE CAPTAIN,
FLAGSTAFF FIRE DEPARTMENT, FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA**

Mr. CHAPMAN. Chair Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Neil Chapman. I am a Wildland Fire Captain with the City of Flagstaff Fire Department in northern Arizona.

I have worked in fire for over 20 years. I am a qualified engine boss and have deployed on fire assignments from Texas to Montana. I am also a former member of the congressional-chartered Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission, which provided one of the most comprehensive roadmaps of policy solutions to date for the wildfire crisis. The Fix Our Forests Act includes many Commission recommendations, with the Senate version touching on a third of the recommendations in the final report.

The City of Flagstaff Fire Department has been a leader in wild-fire risk reduction for 30 years, and it illustrates the important role that local fire departments and districts can play in supporting the aggressive operational tempo necessary for comprehensive community risk reduction.

In 2012 Flagstaff voters approved a \$10 million bond to support the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project, a unique partnership between the Flagstaff Fire Department, the State of Arizona, and the Coconino National Forest. This local investment has leveraged over \$40 million in partner contributions, and allowed the fire department to engage in risk reduction actions across both the built and natural environments.

One of our most important built environment initiatives is our Clean Air Program. We have distributed over 450 HEPA-rated air purifiers, and are developing plans to transform community buildings into clean air hubs. We established a network of indoor and outdoor air quality monitoring stations. Our message is simple: no one should be subjected to low-quality indoor air due to beneficial fire management practices.

The Commission recognized this connection between public health and beneficial fire, that it is inseparable and that, with sustained investment and increased cooperation, we can work together to promote these mutual objectives. While FOFA does not authorize additional funding, it does empower the proposed Fire Intelligence Center to support air quality monitoring programs.

Additionally, the Senate version includes important direction to enable the exceptional events pathway of the Clean Air Act to streamline prescribed burn permitting, a necessary step in reducing fire risk.

The Four Forest Restoration Initiative, or 4FRI, a landscape-scale effort to reduce wildfire risk across the four forests of northern Arizona, was formed nearly 15 years ago with the support of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. 4FRI's 2.4-million-acre NEPA process was completed without litigation, and is now an example of how it can be done. The 4FRI forests are leading in prescribed fire acres accomplished in the West, and the Coconino National Forest has been a top five timber-producing forest for 2 years in a row. We have demonstrated that a robust

NEPA process can provide positive signals to the timber industry that acres will be made available.

The Senate version of FOFA expands on post-NEPA implementation strategies that have worked well within 4FRI, like shared stewardship agreements. It also includes a more robust Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program, an essential program for built environment solutions, with a pathway for input from non-Federal experts like myself.

It is critical that we recognize our wildfire workforce is drawn from local, State, tribal, and Federal entities. Non-Federal wildland fire staff are first responders on about 80 percent of wildfires, regardless of jurisdiction. U.S. Fire Administration statistics indicate that nearly 18,000 fire departments and districts across this country engage in wildfire response. Support for our workforce, our entire workforce, is critical to providing effective wildfire risk reduction.

A significant driver of the wildfire crisis facing communities like Flagstaff is over a century of land management strategies based on wildfire suppression and exclusion. While constant improvement in wildfire response is a natural and important part of our fire service culture, reactive strategies alone do not provide an appropriate level of service to our communities.

For time immemorial, people have used beneficial fire intentionally to steward the land, strengthen communities, and reduce wildfire risk. We can find this balance again. A culture shift based on proactive risk reduction is needed to draw down the long-term costs of wildfire. The Flagstaff Fire Department, along with our local, State, and Federal partners, protect Flagstaff with fire, not just from fire.

The Flagstaff Fire Department stands ready to help support the implementation of wildfire risk reduction at scale, but we cannot do this without strong and committed Federal partners. Chair Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Chapman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NEIL CHAPMAN, WILDLAND FIRE CAPTAIN, CITY OF
FLAGSTAFF FIRE DEPARTMENT

Chair Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Neil Chapman, and I'm a Wildland Fire Captain with the City of Flagstaff Fire Department in Northern Arizona. I worked on my first fire 20 years ago. I am a qualified Engine Boss and have worked on fire assignments across many western states from Texas to Montana. I am also a former member of the congressionally chartered Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission which provided one of the most comprehensive roadmaps of policy solutions to date for the wildfire crisis. Indeed, the Fix Our Forests Act takes up many of the recommendations of the Commission, with the Senate version touching on a third of the recommendations of the final report. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to share my expertise as a municipal wildland firefighter, a participant in the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, and as a former member of the Commission.

I want to highlight that all three experiences offer important lessons in how to manage wildfire risk to communities. Reducing the risk of wildfires to our cities and towns requires a holistic approach that addresses risk in both the lands surrounding our homes and the material of the homes themselves.

The City of Flagstaff Fire Department has been a national leader in wildfire risk reduction for 30 years and illustrates the important role that local fire departments play in reducing wildfire risk to our communities. We do this through collaborative

thinning and prescribed burning projects across multiple jurisdictions, on the land surrounding the city, and through our outreach to community members to help them better prepare their homes and neighborhood to be resistant to wildfire.

Our first Fire Management officer was hired in 1997 and in 2008 we adopted the International Wildland Urban Interface Code. In 2012, Flagstaff voters approved a \$10M bond to support the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project—a partnership effort between the city, the State of Arizona, and the Coconino National Forest to help reduce the risk of undesirable wildfire. This initial investment from the City of Flagstaff has supported over 18,000 acres of thinning, leveraged over \$40M in partner contributions, and allowed the city to significantly reduce its risk and determine its own relationship with wildland fire. Further, the City of Flagstaff has worked to reduce risks in the built environment and safeguard its residents while doing so.

One of our most impactful built environment initiatives is our Clean Air Program. We have distributed over 450 High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) rated air purifiers to the community and are developing plans to transform community buildings into clean air hubs. We have also established a network of indoor and outdoor air quality monitoring stations across the city. We keep an emergency supply of HEPA filters at stations across town and hand deliver them to community members in need. Our message is simple—no one should be subjected to low quality indoor air due to fire management practices.

This effort mirrors conversations within the Commission process. Working with the EPA, we recognized the connection between public health and beneficial fire was inseparable. An entire chapter of the Commission's final report was dedicated to the subject of public health. I believe the following quote from the Commission report summarizes this effort well: "The Commission acknowledges there are real and perceived tensions between the mutually important objectives of protecting public health from the impacts of smoke and enabling and supporting land management practices that reduce the future risk of large, high-severity fire events. While balancing these needs is challenging, the Commission believes that with sustained investment and increased cooperation, federal agencies, Tribes, and state and local agencies can work together under existing laws to clarify and align regulations, policy, and practice to promote these mutual objectives."

The Commission recommended that Congress provide resources to state, local, and Tribal public health authorities to work with wildland fire agencies, the public, and healthcare providers to promote wildland fire and smoke readiness, mitigate risks, and reduce level of potential impact per event. While FOFA does not authorize additional funding, it does empower the proposed Fire Intelligence Center to support air quality monitoring to help protect the public from the impacts of smoke from wildfires and prescribed fires. Additionally, the Senate version includes direction for public health agencies and federal land managers to enable the "exceptional events" pathway of the Clean Air Act to create procedural ease for conducting prescribed burns—a necessary step in reducing fire risk.

Actions in the built environment, like clean air initiatives, defensible space, and home hardening, must complement actions in the natural environment. Investments in beneficial fuels management and built environment modifications are equally as important to the long-term safety of our communities, and firefighters, as investments in our response infrastructure.

While the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project was being implemented in 2012, the Four Forest Restoration Initiative was deep in the NEPA process thanks to the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. The Four Forest Restoration Initiative, known as "4FRI", is a landscape effort to reduce wildfire risk across northern Arizona, covering the Kaibab, Coconino, Apache-Sitgreaves, and Tonto National Forests.

The 4FRI is an excellent example of the planning process done right. The entire problem—a 2.4 million-acre forest at risk of undesirable fire—was analyzed and completed without litigation. By 2022, the majority of the 4FRI footprint was cleared for thinning and burning under two separate NEPA efforts. This NEPA now allows for collective action with thinning and burning projects at a meaningful scale and with strong local participation in the planning process.

I am a past Chair of the 4FRI Stakeholder Group and have had my assumptions challenged more times than I care to admit. I continue to be impressed by this community of partners and value opportunities like this to share our lessons learned.

The 4FRI forests are now producing the most prescribed fire acres of any National Forest in the west annually, and the Coconino National Forest has been in the top five of timber producing forests in the last two years. With proper investments, this success will be sustained for years to come.

None of this would be possible without the collaborative agreements that were developed through the 4FRI NEPA process. This robust planning process provides positive signals to the timber industry that acres will be made available with strong local support. 4FRI leadership, including both USFS and Stakeholders, are committed to ensuring a vital timber industry thrives in northern Arizona.

The continuation of federal funding is crucial to 4FRI's successful active forest management model—a model that is based on leveraging partner and industry investment. Over the last five years, 4FRI enabled over \$188M in timber industry investments and \$54M in partner contributions. For every dollar the USFS has invested in 4FRI since 2022, the timber industry and partner organizations have contributed \$1.42. Research shows that in high-risk areas like northern Arizona, wildfire risk reduction funding sees an estimated \$7 return for every \$1 invested, saving billions of dollars in undesirable wildfire recovery costs (Hjerpe, 2024). The takeaway here is that USFS dollars invested in 4FRI is money well spent; these funds leverage additional contributions from non-federal partners and meaningfully reduce wildfire risk across northern Arizona.

Again, these efforts in Flagstaff provide local level examples of discussions and recommendations of the Commission. The Commission found that federal land management planning efforts and requisite environmental analyses are often not completed at a pace aligned with the increasing impacts of wildfire. Improving planning and analysis are challenges we need to meet to achieve consistent, flexible integration of evolving wildfire science. The two related recommendations I would like to mention that are well supported by the lessons learned from 4FRI are to:

- Expand funding and staffing for planning and Interdisciplinary Teams of federal land management agencies (R23);
- And, explore mechanisms to make planning more effective and efficient, such as improved information gathering, training, staffing, collaboration, and programmatic analyses for restoration and hazardous fuels reduction activities. (R24).

Reducing wildfire risk to communities in the Wildland Urban Interface requires a multifaceted approach in both the natural and built environments, which we see within the Senate version of FOFA. The Senate FOFA builds on the House version to expand shared stewardship agreements with local governments, special districts, water end-users, and other entities while including a more robust Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program, as called for by the Commission. The Senate version would also allow for Community Wildfire Defense Grants to be used for home hardening while providing a pathway for input from non-federal experts like myself to inform and improve the program.

The expanded Senate FOFA also supports the use of prescribed fire to reduce risk on the landscape. The emphasis on more efficient planning, risk reduction in the built environment, and support for the use of prescribed fire, are very important federal efforts for the City of Flagstaff.

I began my testimony today by sharing with you all that I am a wildland firefighter and an Engine Boss. I am a member of the wildfire workforce though I am clearly not a federal employee. It is critical that we recognize that our wildfire workforce is drawn from local, state, Tribal and federal entities. The National Association of State Foresters recently shared that non—federal wildland fire staff are first responders on about 80% of wildfires, regardless of the jurisdiction (National Association of State Foresters, n.d.). Additionally, there are 27,060 fire departments across the U.S. that are registered with the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA). 64% of them provide wildfire response to their community (National Fire Department Registry Quick Facts, n.d.).

Wildfire response across this country will not be improved without significant commitment to and support from the non-federal fire service. The Commission recommended enabling the USFA to increase its ability to support, train, and equip the existing structural fire protection workforce for wildfire response to improve the level of service provided by local fire and emergency medical services organizations. Support for our workforce—our entire workforce—is critical to providing effective risk reduction to our communities. Whether we are working to create cleaner air spaces or extending the reach of federal forest management dollars through active partnership, local fire departments and fire districts are an essential part of the solution.

The Flagstaff Fire Department stands ready to help support the implementation of wildfire risk reduction at scale, but we cannot do this without the support of strong and committed federal partners.

The following document was submitted as a supplement to Mr. Chapman's testimony:



Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chapman. Now, Mr. Weiner, it is your turn for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MATT WEINER, CEO, MEGAFIRE ACTION, CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA

Mr. WEINER. Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, thank you so much for having me here today. My name is Matt Weiner. I am the CEO and Founder of Megafire Action. We are a non-profit

founded on a simple premise: megafire is solvable, and therefore we need to be doing a lot more to address it.

As we saw in January, the megafire crisis is continuing to accelerate, with fires starting in wildland, often creeping into the built environment with catastrophic effect. Our systems are being overwhelmed at every level.

The Fix Our Forests Act is a really important place to start. This is a non-partisan emergency that requires a bipartisan response, and we were happy to see that bill move through the House earlier this year. At its core, the Fix Our Forests Act tackles three key challenges: community wildfire resilience, permitting reform, and technology adoption for improved decision-making, all essential to make up an effective wildfire mitigation work in the WUI and beyond.

Let me start with permitting reform. We all know that selective thinning, fuel breaks, and prescribed fire can restore ecosystem balance and reduce risk, yet we are nowhere near meeting the scale needed. Last year the Forest Service treated 800,000 acres of the highest-risk landscapes, a record high, but still far short of the millions needed to reach our targets. One major barrier is the slow and costly permitting process. The Forest Service estimates that planning and assessments consume 40 percent of total direct work and can frequently lead to years of delays.

I want to note that there are very legitimate reasons to be concerned about changes to NEPA and environmental laws in this regard. Lessons forged in the timber wars will not and should not be easily forgotten. But the facts on the ground have changed, and our laws need to change to reflect that.

And we have seen that cutting red tape can get results. As the Chairman mentioned, the 10,000-acre categorical exclusions for fuels reduction in the Lake Tahoe basin sped up treatment, helping halt the Caldor fire before it reached South Lake Tahoe. After losing 20 percent of the world's giant sequoias to wildfires, the Forest Service expedited NEPA review in 2022, enabling the Giant Sequoia Lands Coalition to treat 54 percent of groves within just the past few years.

While much of the conversation around permitting reform is centered on landscape-scale fuels treatments in forested environments, fuel break projects in the WUI face similar delays. The Chairman noted that the Angeles National Forest, where the deadly Eaton Fire broke out, had severe permitting delays in being able to implement its fuel break plan. I won't go back into the story because he has told it better than I could, but the fact that red tape held up our progress on being able to do something there is unacceptable.

A company we work with named Vibrant Planet found that \$9 million in mitigation work in this area could have protected \$40 billion in assets, and yet we weren't able to get the job done in time. If FOFA had been law, the project could have been implemented under one categorical exclusion in 6 months instead of 4 years.

When it comes to the built environment, we know how to build communities that are more resilient to megafire, and yet there isn't a single region in the country that is getting this right. Research

shows that home hardening, zone zero, and defensible space can increase a home survival rate by over 40 percent, yet creating and maintaining ember-resistant homes and landscaping in high-risk areas remains under-emphasized in Federal policy.

For instance, the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program cannot currently support home-hardening projects. The Senate version of FOFA would address this problem by allowing new uses for Community Wildfire Defense Program, and once that is passed, Congress should consider increasing funding for this program to ensure that FOFA reforms can lead to results.

The bill also establishes the Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program, inspired by recommendation one from the Wildfire Commission. This program is designed to improve interagency coordination and provide communities with the resources needed to reduce wildfire risk.

Over the last several years we have seen an explosion of technology companies offering solutions at every phase of fire. This isn't a hypothetical, pie-in-the-sky thing here. Scalable technology already exists to make taxpayer-funded programs more effective, and yet those tools remain fragmented across more than 50 Federal programs with strained budgets, leaving the government unable to effectively deploy tech for those who need it most when they need it most. The Fix Our Forests Act addresses this by creating a firehosed center to improve wildfire decision-making across prevention, suppression, and recovery. There is currently no single entity in the United States responsible for evaluating, understanding, and acting on risk across landscapes and jurisdictions. Like a combat support agency, this center will integrate real-time intelligence, predictive modeling, and risk assessments to support firefighters, land managers, and communities.

And I should note that insurance companies have access to the most advanced modeling here, but our community leaders do not, and that puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to designing communities that can actually be resilient to fire.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Weiner.

Mr. WEINER. In conclusion, the Fix Our Forests Act will move the Federal Government towards a more proactive, science-based approach to wildfire management. The bipartisan effort led by Chairman Westerman and Representative Peters has produced a solid product with a real shot at becoming law this year.

I just want to note the comments by Ranking Member Huffman. It is true that we cannot fix our forests if we do not fund these programs and we do not implement this law. But I think, conversely, it is important to note that we could get all the funding we needed tomorrow, and we would not be able to get the job done without these authorities. So this is an important step that we need to consider. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Weiner follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATT WEINER, CEO, MEGAFIRE ACTION



To: U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

From: Matt Weiner, CEO, Megafire Action

Subject: Fix Our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface

Date: May 15th, 2025

Introduction

Chairman Gosar, Vice Chair Boebert, Ranking Member Dexter, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on legislative options to reduce catastrophic wildfire. My name is Matt Weiner, and I'm the founder and CEO of Megafire Action, a non-profit organization committed to ending the megafire crisis through a holistic approach to land management, wildfire response, and community resilience.

January's devastating fires in Los Angeles were just the latest, tragic demonstration of the need for bipartisan legislative action to address the escalating wildfire crisis across the United States. I am honored to testify in support of the Fix Our Forests Act, which passed the House of Representatives on a wide bipartisan basis and has now been introduced in the Senate by a bipartisan group of senators. This legislation represents an essential step toward reversing decades of mismanagement and reducing the scale and intensity of catastrophic wildfire.

Decades of fire exclusion combined with ineffective land management, expansion of poorly planned development in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and extremely hot and dry conditions have created a megafire crisis across the United States. Catastrophic megafires—distinguished by their extreme intensity, rapid spread, and large-scale destruction—are no longer anomalies but a persistent national emergency. These fires threaten human lives, destroy homes and critical infrastructure, and reshape ecosystems in ways that may be irreversible. Their impact extends beyond burned landscapes and communities; wildfires release massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, exacerbating climate change and contributing to long-term environmental degradation that fuels ever greater wildfires in a viscous feedback loop. We are running out of time to prevent widespread devastation to communities, ecosystems, and the environment and legislative action is needed now more than ever.

At its core, the Fix Our Forests Act tackles three key challenges: community wildfire resilience, permitting reform, and technology adoption for improved decision making—all essential to scaling up effective wildfire mitigation work in the Wildland Urban Interface and beyond.

While this legislation will not resolve the long-standing workforce and budget constraints that have plagued wildfire mitigation and response for decades, it represents a critical and necessary step toward a more proactive and science-driven approach to wildfire management. We cannot ignore the fact that firefighters continue to be put in impossible positions - and our federal fighters in particular have been asked to do too much, with too little, for too long. A permanent, well-resourced federal wildfire workforce remains an urgent need.

The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II15/20250515/118173/HHRG-119-II15-Wstate-WeinerM-20250515.pdf>

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Weiner. We are now going to go to the gentleman from Alaska, Mr. Begich, for his 5 minutes.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The first question here to Chief Munsey.

One of the key Alaska wins in this bill is the formal authority for tribal and State governments to enter into shared stewardship agreements that cross jurisdictional lines. That is a game-changer for places like rural Alaska, where multiple entities manage a single fire-prone landscape. How important is this type of intergovernmental coordination for getting work done quickly on the ground, in your view?

Mr. MUNSEY. Sir, it is of critical importance, and a statement.

Let me expand. This year I have had our Board of Supervisors allocate \$500,000 simply for a study of how we bring Federal, State, tribal, local governments together to first decide on what good looks like in an interagency fashion. Often we see siloed efforts within the CEs that may be granted. Some of this is tied up with legislation, but it is a patchwork quilt that is not very well stitched together. So the first would be to bring those parties together to decide what good looks like.

The second part of that study would look at the regulatory environment. What I am very hopeful for is that, with a bill like the Fix Our Forests, that we are able to bring the technology where we can create a one-stop-shop for agencies to move through the permit process to understand this regulatory environment.

The third portion of this study is to find out what funding is needed today to completely protect our county, again, jurisdictionless.

The fourth is the maintenance of the work that we do. What is the maintenance schedule? And this is critical because often we do these fuel projects, but then a couple of years go by—7, 8, 9, 10—and they are erased, like the picture I showed from the 1930s.

The final stage is what is the maintenance dollars that need to be set aside on an annual basis to make sure that the efforts that we do today are sustainable in the future?

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you.

An additional question, I will open up for anyone who would like to answer, another Alaska win in the bill is the Fire Shed Registry, a public map showing what areas have been treated, what projects are in the pipeline, and how well they are working. As folks who are focused on public accountability, how do you see this kind of tool changing the game for communities trying to understand where their risk and progress really stands?

Mr. MUNSEY. Let me help on that one real quick. We use a common operating picture of the Angeles National Forest, the San Bernardino National Forest. The Angeles National Forest was where the Eaton Fire Palisades were burning. The San Bernardino national forest—both are in our jurisdiction. San Bernardino is the most heavily recreated, lived-in forest. We work with both of those agencies closely, but there is no common operating picture that allows us to share what our fuel management efforts are.

So this year we are paying \$250,000 for that common operating picture because the Federal Government agencies lack the ability

to adopt technology. So we pay for them to use this technology so that we can congruently plan for the future.

Mr. BEGICH. Would anyone else like to weigh in on that?

Mr. WEINER. I was going to jump on in on that, but that was pretty good. I would just say that this is really helpful from a prioritization standpoint, but also really necessary from an accountability standpoint. We don't have a really good grasp of what we are doing on the ground right now across jurisdictions, and that is a huge problem.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you very much.

And I will yield the balance of my time, Mr. Chair.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you. Do you want to yield that time to me?

Mr. BEGICH. I will yield the balance of my time to you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. GOSAR. I will yield to the gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Well, thank you, and I very much appreciate you having this hearing. I think it is incredibly important.

Chief Munsey, what you said at the beginning is so critical if we are actually going to have accountability and have the ability to properly manage and protect these resources. There are an awful lot of lies out there. And I am going to have an opportunity to ask some additional questions, but there is a few things that I think everybody in this room ought to understand.

In 2001, on January 12, Bill Clinton, on his way out of office, adopted the Roadless Rule. It denied access management and use to 58.5 million acres of National Forest Service lands, and that is the reason why we are here today, and why we have the crisis on our hands related to management of our national forests and the catastrophic forest fires and the beetle outbreak that we have seen over the last 25 years.

I will just give you one example. In 1997 there was a blowdown in Routt National Forest that knocked down 13,000 acres of trees in one night because that was a roadless area and partially a wilderness area, the Forest Service would not allow anyone to go in there and treat. All you need to do is look at Landsats. All you need to do is look at aerial photography, color infrareds, and you can watch as that pine beetle outbreak emanated outward from there.

That is not because of global warming. That is not because of climate change. That is because of bad forest management and the Roadless Rule. That is the reason why our forests have been devastated because of the Roadless Rule and bad policies coming out of Washington, D.C. And if you are unwilling to recognize that, we are never going to be able to fix our forests, we are never going to be able to protect these resources.

So you are absolutely right. Until we are honest about what has happened in our national forests, we are not going to protect this resource.

With that I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentlewoman from Arizona, Ms. Ansari, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to first start by thanking our witnesses for being here today, especially Captain Chapman, who does such important work in my home State of Arizona.

Arizona is on the front lines of the Nation's forest management challenges. Our wildfire seasons are becoming increasingly severe, more frequent, more intense, and more destructive due to the climate crisis.

Currently, the Bryce Fire in southeastern Arizona has already scorched nearly 3,000 acres. At the same time, the Coyote Fire in northeastern Arizona near the New Mexico border has burned close to 1,200 acres. This highlights just how important it is that we ensure our wildfire prevention teams have the resources they need to adequately prepare for and respond to wildfire season.

Unfortunately, instead of strengthening these efforts, DOGE and the Trump administration have cut critical fire prevention programs, fired thousands of workers that prepare for and respond to wildfires around the country, and imposed a Federal hiring freeze that could significantly hamper operations during peak fire season. That is why earlier this year I sent a letter to the Trump administration expressing urgent concern about the potential impact of the current Federal hiring freeze on the Forest Service's seasonal wildland firefighting workforce in Arizona.

The seasonal firefighters employed by the Forest Service protect our communities, our infrastructure, and our public lands during the wildfire season. The uncertainty surrounding this year's hiring process threatens to leave the agency dangerously understaffed at a critical time.

Captain Chapman, as of September of last year the Biden administration allocated \$60 million to Arizona for wildfire mitigation and recovery under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This funding was for things like fuel management projects, prescribed fires, firefighter training, and wildfire science. I want to ask you about how your ability to fight fires will be impacted if Elon Musk and DOGE take this funding away from our State.

What would happen, Captain Chapman, if you lost millions of dollars for fuel management projects?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Thank you for the for the question.

You know, really, we like to think about fighting the fire before the fire starts. Fire is local. And so in our area we can really do a good job restoring the natural structure and pattern of our ponderosa pine forest. That keeps the fire on the ground. When the fire is on the ground, we can actually engage that fire, we can get in front of that fire. Tools, trucks, people do a really good job when the fire is on the ground. We can't do a whole lot when the fire is in the trees. So keeping that fire on the ground is really important for us. And the way we do that is really something that has grown to be called the Flagstaff model, and that is a locally-driven, collaborative process to treat our lands around the community.

Whether it is private lands, whether it is city lands, whether it is State, or Federal, we are pretty successful at getting that money and putting it into the ground, into these treatments. And so any time we see a reduction in capacity to implement these fuel reduction treatments, it makes it harder to protect our community.

So it is not just implementing that treatment, but it is also, as we have heard, maintaining those treatments, as well. So our timber industry is growing in our area. Investments into that industry are very important. And maintaining that stability to give that struggling timber industry the assurance that investments in our area are a smart thing for them is very important for our communities, and then that ties into the built environment investments, as well.

And so working with our partners here at IBHS to better build our communities to adapt to that low-intensity surface fire that we know is important for our forests—not only can firefighters get in front of a low-intensity surface fire, defensible space and home-hardening and that effective and safe response is really important for our communities to protect themselves from a fast-moving grass fire.

So upfront work—

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you.

Mr. CHAPMAN [continuing]. Is really the most important thing we can do.

Ms. ANSARI. Great. And just for the sake of time, I will ask my two following questions.

What would happen if you lost millions of dollars for prescribed fires and then also for firefighter training?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Obviously, that would increase risk to our community. There is no other way to say it. If we can't maintain our treatments with prescribed fire, I mean, our natural fire return intervals every couple of years. If we don't have the people to put that fire on the ground and maintain those treatments, then our trees are growing back and we start seeing that risk increase again.

Ms. ANSARI. Thank you, Captain Chapman.

I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlelady. The gentlelady from Colorado, Ms. Boebert, is recognized for her 5 minutes.

Ms. BOEBERT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I would echo Ms. Hageman's statements. We have been unable to properly manage our forests for decades now, and it has really prevented us from being proactive when it comes to wildfires.

I live in Colorado. We are part of the beetle kill epidemic that is taking place. We have six billion standing dead trees in the West, all creating a massive tinderbox. When we have a catastrophic wildfire, it will emit more carbon emissions, according to NASA, in a single day than an entire State having all of their vehicles running 24/7. And so this is a real problem, and we have to be proactive in managing our forests, and that really stems to everything. It is the core of everything when we have unhealthy forests and we have unhealthy watersheds.

About 80 percent of Colorado's municipal water comes from our forests. And to protect that, we must protect our forests. In Colorado we have really been prey to wilderness areas, these designations that prevent us from managing; the Roadless Rule that contributes to things like the Routt forest fire and many others. I have been in the air, seeing these fires, and you can have

all the money in the world, but if you aren't going to actually manage, or if you are prohibited from managing the forest, then we are going to continue to have these catastrophic wildfires.

Chief Munsey, with all of the policy that is out there that prevents forest management, which policies would you like to see maybe deregulated in order to properly get to a goal of minimizing catastrophic wildfires before they happen?

Mr. MUNSEY. I would like to see the Fix Our Forests Act passed and become national policy, because I think that the CE is allowing us to treat greater areas of critical importance.

I am going to divert just a little bit from your question to go back to the previous comments on the millions of dollars—

Ms. BOEBERT. Please, yes.

Mr. MUNSEY [continuing]. That could be taken away from local government.

We recently did a study about where is the money going, because I am going to be honest, I demonstrated in our picture how we solved the bark beetle problem. 1.1 million trees were pulled away. That money doesn't come to us. It is going to other groups that have no accountability. We are not focusing on the outcomes of where the dollars are going, we are focusing simply on what people are saying and the outputs.

That money needs to be brought back into local communities to do actual work. There needs to be technology and dashboards that prove to our citizens that what we are doing is focusing on outcomes so that we can get this work done. So everything you say I agree with.

The process of what we need to do is to have better leadership that is more than just focusing—and I love President Trump's proposal to bring the wildfire agencies together. That is a bold move, because there is overlap in what we are doing. But the biggest thing is that we don't have a key decision-making.

And we talk about the national forests. On one end I have the Angeles National Forest in our jurisdiction. On the second end I have San Bernardino National Forest. There is two different forest supervisors, and the same Federal policies are interpreted so differently.

Leadership is critical, and I think that we need to use technology and artificial intelligence not only for the permitting process, but to fairly apply the Federal policies to allow us to do our job so that we can get into our forests, get into our communities to do meaningful work so that our homeowners can have insurance for their houses, so they can have this expectation that a fire that is originating in the natural resources isn't going to burn into our communities. Thank you.

Ms. BOEBERT. Yes, I know President Trump has been focused on cleaning up forest floors and getting those fuels off the ground. And would you agree that those in the timber industry—when they are allowed to go in and harvest timber from our forests, they create roads to get in there. Does that benefit your fire mitigation efforts?

Mr. MUNSEY. I served on Federal incident management teams for well over a decade, and fought fires in forests that allowed the timber industry. And I will tell you unequivocally that the infrastructure that is in place allows us to access these fires.

More importantly, a lot of the areas that have had timber harvesting are great places to stop the fire. It is a good place to introduce good fire. It has been extremely helpful having that infrastructure in place.

I am not a forester like Mr. Westerman, but I also understand—

Ms. BOEBERT. None of us are.

Mr. MUNSEY. But I also understand that—and I watched a recent CNN interview, he is an outstanding football player, and he can weigh in on Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift and the Chiefs.

[Laughter.]

Mr. MUNSEY. Nice job, sir.

Ms. BOEBERT. Thank you, Chief. My time has expired.

I yield.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman. The gentleman from the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, the football player, is next to be recognized.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Gosar. I hope I am a better forester than I was a football player.

Again, thank you to the witnesses. There are so many questions I have got on this issue.

But Mr. Wright, I want to start with you. Last year I had a chance to get out to Orange County, and was with Representative Young Kim. And she had kind of a town hall meeting on wildfire. And I saw something there I have not seen in other places. There were people talking about not being able to sleep at night, worried about wildfire. There were people, really, with some serious concerns about their home, which may be the biggest asset they have, and not being able to get insurance on it. The issue, I think, is much, much greater than what the full country understands it to be.

And we know between 2020 and 2022, insurance companies declined to renew 2.8 million homeowner insurance policies in the State of California. All states stopped issuing new insurance in 2022 and increased premiums on existing policies last year by 34 percent. It doesn't appear this is getting any better anytime soon. If we fail to act, what will happen to the insurance industry and home markets in fire-prone states like California?

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes. So first of all, California's primary insurance problem deals with the regulations that have been in place. And they are on a pathway, presumably, to address those elements. And so much of what homeowners across the State, whether or not they have wildfire or not, they have that reality. Those are the companies that you have named in that space.

What I can tell you is insurers are looking forward to a day by which the rate adequacy is in place, and they are focused specifically on what does a home look like that has addressed its risk? Has it narrowed the path of destruction so that if wildfire does come blowing in with embers, will they be able to land and extinguish before they move down the road?

Homeowners are in that space where they want their home to survive, they want their community to survive, and they want it to be insurable. And I think the actions that we are talking about here address the fuel loads in the wildland and ensure that when

fire approaches and it comes into the community, we are not seeing the conflagration of home after home lost.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, and I think of it as triage. We have got to address the wildland-urban interface, we have got to address transportation corridors, transmission corridors, watersheds. It is a vast problem that took decades to happen, but we have seen results of how good management practices work.

And Captain Chapman, we bumped into each other in the elevator this morning. We were recounting years ago I made a trip out to Flagstaff, and we saw some forest management there. Can you describe the benefits of those thinning projects?

And what kind of forest do you have left? Did something get clear-cut and paved over, or what happened there?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Thank you for the question.

I think, we could easily talk about basal area and, canopy cover, but the homesteaders in the Flagstaff area, so they could take a horse and a carriage at a trot through the forest at all times. It was just full of these big, fire-tolerant trees. It changed, and it filled in, and now we have hundreds of trees per acre, so an exponential increase in density.

We have proven over and over again when we go in and we restore that natural structure and pattern of a fire-adapted ponderosa pine forest, that we can keep the fire on our terms. Even on red-flag, windy days, when a fire starts in a spot that has either had prescribed fire or a thinning treatment and prescribed fire, or in an area where we have had a beneficial wildfire, we can control that fire. We can keep it out of the community, and we can steer it in a positive way.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And keep the forest intact.

Mr. CHAPMAN. And the forest stays healthy, exactly.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Right.

Mr. CHAPMAN. And so, really, having all of those things in alignment is so important for us to protect our communities, protect our first responders, and get those treatments on the ground, and doing it in a cross-jurisdictional way because, as we have heard earlier, fire doesn't care if there is a fence line there. It is going to keep moving.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes. Quickly, Chief Munsey, you put the picture up that showed the road infrastructure from decades ago. Last fall we took a CODEL over to Scandinavia. We went to Finland, where they have some of the most detailed forest management of any place in the world. And they were talking about how they very rarely had problems with fires because of their management, and also because of their road network, that if they had a fire they could get in and put it out.

And when I explained to them that, if we build a road on the forest in the U.S., we have to just tear the road out after we are through doing the work. And even these Europeans thought we were crazy that we did something like that, we actually spent money to build a road, then we spent money to tear the road out.

And we know the Roadless Rule came into effect, probably targeting my friend, Representative Begich's Tongass Forest. It was a way to keep harvest from happening in the Tongass, but it has affected the whole country.

And I am way out of time, but if Mr. Munsey would like to add anything about the Roadless issue, and how big of an issue that is on not being able to manage and to keep fires under control.

Mr. MUNSEY. First, I am grateful for your leadership. I am also grateful you haven't seen my CNN interviews.

You are right. And after the Line Fire that burned through 50,000 acres, we can clearly see the corn rows where the old roads existed. And we asked our local forests if we can re-establish these roads. We can't because of environmental concerns, and that makes almost no sense. This is what worked for almost a century to keep our fires small. This is the Civilian Conservation Corps from the 1930s that put all those roads in.

It is critical that we have early access to these fires. We have got to get there quick. We have had a mindset in the fire service for way too long that we are going to keep wildfires 10 square acres or less 95 percent of the time, 10 square acres or less 95 percent of the time. The problem is, what about that other 5 percent or 10 percent in some other agencies? These fires are getting huge, and a lot of it has to do with access.

The second is these roads can be used as control points. The fire will bump up into it. Having these access allows us to maintain these forests to introduce good fire, as they are doing in Flagstaff, so that we can have healthy forests.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Chairman Westerman.

The gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher, is now recognized for his 5 minutes.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the panel for being here today, and I would like to start with a question for Mr. Wright, or at least some dialogue, I hope.

I come from the great State of Idaho, and we have approximately 34 million acres of federally controlled land in that State. We have got about 2 million people. So what that means is we really don't have a choice sometimes as to where the urban places are placed, and how people live and where they live. And we really do have an insurance problem. The Federal Government is totally overwhelmed when it comes to forest management, and the policies that are in place have not allowed for wise management. And so many of our residential regions have no option when it comes to insurance.

And I would just like to get your feedback. What do we do? How do we mitigate that, whether it be on the private side, on the Federal side? I need some counsel, please.

Mr. WRIGHT. Well, as you know and have alluded to, so insurance is regulated by each State and territory. So 56 different insurance regimes are in place across the country. And you look in those elements. So your experiences are different than Wyoming, and they are different than Arizona.

Mr. FULCHER. Probably not a lot, actually. We probably have a lot of similar problems.

Mr. WRIGHT. Similar problems, but how the insurance is regulated is different from State to State.

Fundamentally, insurance on the property side is there to understand what the potential losses are and charge premiums so they can be there on a bad day and pay those claims. I do think

we are in a point by which we have to collectively take on these risks.

What is particularly hard with wildfire, which is different than some other pieces, is once it gets into a suburban neighborhood it can move from structure to structure to structure very, very quickly. You have very, very large losses for the insurance companies and the community.

Mr. FULCHER. But what about on the Federal agency front? Is there some focus that we should be putting there?

I mean, on the private side, I can understand, regardless of what the local regulation is.

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes—

Mr. FULCHER. Let me finish. A private insurance company is not going to want to take a risk if there is adjacent mismanaged land that puts them at risk.

Mr. WRIGHT. Two important things I think Fix Our Forests addresses.

First of all, the fuel loads, those dead trees, the kinds of pieces there that can exacerbate the risk, have to be addressed that sits in your State primarily on Federal lands.

The second piece is, when those actions took place—and Mr. Begich spoke about this—having that dashboard that says what mitigation actions took place, where have they been maintained because the insurance industry needs to have visibility on those pieces. So much of that has its potential to be addressed by the Forest Service, by BLM, by others. The community, as well as the insurance industry needs to have visibility on what has been done, as well as the flip side, what has not been done.

Mr. FULCHER. OK, thank you for that.

Mr. Munsey, I want to shift to you just for a moment here. Given your expertise, can you cite, you know, from a Western State perspective any models where Federal land managers have had some success in prioritizing the urban versus rural, and how that gets managed? Is there any success stories that you can relate to that might be a good model?

Mr. MUNSEY. Yes, sir. I would specifically recommend you look at the Angeles National Forest. The Chief 1 of that forest, Bobby Garcia, is performing at a very high level.

Mr. FULCHER. I am sorry, where was that?

Mr. MUNSEY. His name is Bobby Garcia. He is the Chief 1 of the Angeles National Forest. And what surprises me is he works in the same Federal regulatory environment. He works for the same bosses, within the same budget. He works with the same lawsuits, yet he is able to get things done, and I think that he is an absolute success.

I demonstrated in one of my photos how the Bridge Fire, which occurred in the Angeles National Forest just east of where the Eaton Fire would start months later, the fuel treatments on the Bridge Fire allowed us to limit that fire. That fire had exponential growth, 34,000 acres in 1 day. But when it hit these fuel-treated areas, the fire went to the ground, it was a low-intensity fire, and our firefighters were able to pick that up. I look at that as an absolute case study, and I would be happy to send you a report

that was developed by that forest on the effects of fuel treatment on large fires.

Mr. FULCHER. Mr. Munsey, I would greatly appreciate that. If we could make a note, either through staff or directly, I would love to see it.

Mr. MUNSEY. Yes, sir.

Mr. FULCHER. All right, Mr. Chairman, thank you. I yield back.

Mr. CHAPMAN. Could I just make a real quick comment?

Dr. GOSAR. Sure.

Mr. CHAPMAN. Doing the work on the public land didn't move the needle the way we had hoped in Flagstaff. We have homeowners that have thousands of acres of thinning treatments around their land that are still having the exact same insurance challenges that we are talking about here, so it has got to be a combination of both the public land management, which is difficult.

But getting into the neighborhoods and doing the built environment work is just as important. We know that we can reduce the fire risk on the public lands through collaborative processes. It is not removing the fire risk. That neighborhood still has to be designed in a smart way to be able to resist a ground fire, not just a crown fire. So it is hoping that if we do the thinning and the effective public land management is part of it, but our experience in Flagstaff is we have done a lot of that around our community. I can look at Google Maps and show you incredible treatment acres we have got around the city, and we are still seeing insurance challenges.

Mr. FULCHER. Duly noted. Thank you.

Thank you. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. The gentleman yields back. The gentlewoman from Wyoming, Ms. Hageman, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

I filed a lawsuit in 2001 challenging the Roadless Rule. I was hired by the State of Wyoming to do that. And there is a few more points that I think are extremely important because, again, this is the source of many of the problems that we are dealing with in terms of forest management.

I believe that the Roadless Rule is one of the most destructive regulations ever adopted in the history of the United States in terms of being able to manage and protect our forests, our watersheds, and our surrounding lands. And in fact, at the time that the Roadless Rule was adopted, the Forest Service and the Department of Justice defending it knew that it was going to be destructive. And I will just give you one quote from the attorney who was handling the case—and defending it against the State of Wyoming's lawsuit.

When we pointed out that there were separate management plans for every forest throughout the United States, that it was inappropriate to treat all roadless areas the same, that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work, especially when you are talking about forest management, I will never forget what the U.S. attorney said when she got up to defend the Roadless Rule. She said, "We recognize that in certain areas the Roadless Rule is going to be ecologically devastating." That was the term that she used, "ecologically devastating." "But it is more important that we have

one rule and one regime coming out of Washington, D.C. to manage these acres than protecting local particular areas.”

When I went through the administrative record, one of the things that I focused on were the comments that were received by the local foresters, the good men and women who actually work in the States, work in the national forests. They submitted thousands of comments, the vast majority of which opposed the Roadless Rule. And what they said is, “Please, please do not do this to us. Please do not prevent us from being able to manage our national forests. Please do not do this. We are going to have horrific insect infestations and we are going to have catastrophic forest fires. You are going to destroy the resource if you adopt the Roadless Rule.”

Keep in mind the national forests are 192 million acres strong. They were created within the Department of Agriculture. They are supposed to be managed as a commodity for a continuous supply of timber and a continuous supply of water. They are not a national park and they are not within the Department of the Interior.

So the adoption of the Roadless Rule, again, is why we are facing this circumstance.

The Fix our Forests Act, which passed the House, expanded the permissible use of the Good Neighbor Authority to include reconstruction, repair, and restoration of roads on non-U.S. Forest Service lands to support forest management projects, and it did a whole variety of other things. And I am very, very pleased that our panel today seems to be unanimous in supporting our Fix Our Forests Act.

Mr. Weiner, I would like to refer to you. It is my understanding that there are some in the Senate who have proposed removing certain aspects of this bill. Could you please speak to the benefit of the authority that I just described that is expanded in the Fix Our Forests Act, and what that would do to our ability to have active management?

Mr. WEINER. Yes, around Good Neighbor Authority?

Ms. HAGEMAN. Yes, please.

Mr. WEINER. Yes, Good Neighbor Authority is a really important tool to help build capacity for States to do some of this work on the ground, State and local partners, right?

And I think that, even if you take a step back from the current funding and workforce crisis that we are facing right now at the Forest Service, we are nowhere near on track to meet our goals. We need to come up with creative ways to fund these kinds of projects, and expanding Good Neighbor Authority is critical to doing that.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I appreciate that. And, Chief Munsey, from your duty to provide community protection, can you explain why access to the ignition point is critical, and how good roads and infrastructure enable this capability?

Mr. MUNSEY. Yes, that is a simple answer, is that fires are going to double in size every 4 minutes or so. If we can't make access, these fires are going to continue to grow.

Now, there are other things that are important besides access. That is early detection. That is both terrestrial and celestial, such as low-Earth or Earth-orbiting satellites, and I think that this ecosystem is critical, having the ability to detect wildfires. And an

example I can give you is you have a lightning that starts a smoldering fire. It may not produce any smoke. Nobody sees it. But this fire is smoldering. It could burn several acres. And then, when the wind kicks up and it becomes hotter and drier, now you have a well-established fire. So that early detection is just as critical as that early access.

Secondly is looking at technology on how we suppress wildfires. Two weeks ago in San Bernardino we piloted a fully-autonomous Black Hawk helicopter with a company called Rain. It used early detection and, in this case, cameras using AI to find the fire. And it doesn't have to be visible smoke with some of the spectrums. It automatically launched that helicopter that flew pilotless and dropped water on that fire during the fire behavioral modeling, returned, reloaded with water, and made drops. This is the future. Early detection, early response, not necessarily humans on the on the ground, followed by control using robotics and then truthing it out with boots on the ground, regardless.

Even using technology in overgrown forests using helicopter and aviation, you are not at times going to be effectively able to control fires. You need to get people there, hand crews, heavy equipment there. The only way that we can do that is having good access.

Ms. HAGEMAN. So I very much appreciate those comments. One last thing. I realize that I am out of time, but I think it is important for everyone to understand. The National Forest Service created the Fraser Experimental Forest in northern Colorado many, many years ago. I believe that it is going on over 100 years in terms of being in operation, and the Fraser Experimental Forest is something that I would recommend everybody study and go see. They have studied everything from water development through forest management. They look at treating the north side of ridges versus the south side, what that does. They have done every study that you can possibly think of in relation to forest management.

I don't know how much they do in terms of fire suppression, but in terms of management of the actual resource itself, we have massive amounts of data and information, and we know how to manage these forests effectively. It is things like the Roadless Rule, and bad policies and regulations coming out of Washington, D.C., and an obsession with global warming and climate change that is preventing us from doing this adequately. Please go to look at what the Fraser Experimental Forest has to offer in terms of giving us the tools to better manage these resources.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman. The gentleman from good, old Arizona, Mr. Eli Crane, is recognized.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very important hearing today, and I want to thank you guys for all coming to testify.

I am pretty new to Congress myself. I represent Arizona's 2nd congressional district, which is about 53 percent of Arizona. To start to educate myself on this very important issue over the last couple of years I have visited timber sales within the district. Just recently, outside of Flagstaff, you know, I went and saw a controlled burn, which was very impressive, the professionalism at which you guys were handling that. I also just went to the new

sawmill outside of Flagstaff. I was also very impressed with that operation. We have gone to the Ecological Restoration Institute at NAU. My entire staff went there so we could learn more about this issue.

And it is a very serious issue. I have had a lot of people in the district tell me they have been very concerned this year with the lack of moisture that we have got, and they feel like we are in a vulnerable situation. And we also have a couple fires right now burning in the district.

Mr. Chapman, I want to start with you, and thank you for coming, sir. I want to thank you for what you do for Arizona, northern Arizona communities. As you know, my district includes several areas prone to wildfires, including the Kaibab, the Coconino, Apache-Sitgreaves, and Tonto National Forests, which are all part of 4FRI.

I have seen firsthand the work that is required to properly manage our forests and conduct hazardous fuel treatment. Like I said, I recently went to the new sawmill just outside of Flagstaff, which has already been instrumental in supporting thinning efforts, and I was proud to see how Northern Arizona is more than capable of meeting goals in President Trump's executive order.

Mr. Chapman, can you speak to the impact of proactive fuel reduction efforts, and how you have seen forest thinning as effective management strategy?

Mr. CHAPMAN. We see it every single day. We really have an incredibly fire-adapted system, and that system and how it burns is really up to us. And the collaborative process that we have established in Flagstaff allows us to, most days, turn a bad fire into not a big deal that you don't hear about because of those fuel treatments that we have done in the woods, because of the collaborative process.

Building on Chief Munsey, we now have a really robust network of cameras around the Flagstaff area through a partnership with Arizona Public Service, the Arizona APS, the utility. So we are really trying to check all those boxes on community risk reduction efforts. We do the treatments, we do the monitoring, we do the maintenance, we do the annual collaboration between our first responders, so our state, Federal, and local partners.

You know, when we get a call and we roll out, it doesn't really matter right away whether it is Forest Service or city or State land. We get there, we will deal with that later, and the dispatch centers sort that out. So that collaborative process has been the game-changer for us in both response and implementing those treatments, and then maintaining those treatments.

So thank you for the question and for the kind comments on our work in the community.

Mr. CRANE. Yes, sir. You also mentioned in your testimony that in high-risk areas like northern Arizona wildfire risk reduction season estimated \$7 return for every \$1 invested some crucial research from Ecological Restoration Institute at NAU.

Can you explain how-risk reduction funding saves taxpayer dollars down the line?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Absolutely. We can look at some of the treatments around our community. We just heard about the Fraser

Experimental Forest. We actually have the first experimental forest in the country in the Flagstaff area, the Fort Valley Experimental Forest. And there is a network of treatments that have taken place around that forest, as well.

Some of our treatments around the Flagstaff area within 4FRI are starting to actually pay for themselves. They needed to be subsidized for a while before the timber industry that is doing this restoration work could get up to speed and have that capacity. And so it is really a long story—like I said, 4FRI has been around almost 15 years now—to get where we are. But those initial investments in providing the certainty that the trees will be made available to the industry to do this restoration work has been the game-changer that is allowing a company like the Restoration Forest Products that you went and visited to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into that facility.

So when we actually see per-acre boots on the ground, if we are spending you know, the NEPA, the management, the oversight, all of that work on the Federal side, for every dollar that we are seeing of partners go into those projects we are estimating—and I think it is probably a fairly low estimate because there is all these costs that we just can't calculate—that if we can prevent a \$15 million fire with a couple thousand dollars' worth of subsidies for our treatments, then we are avoiding significant costs, and we are staying in a positive space.

Mr. CRANE. Yes. I know that ponderosa pines are not considered the most valuable timber in the country, and I have talked to constituents and also industry leaders who say that one of their biggest challenges in bringing in private investments to help us deal with some of the fire mitigation efforts is that the Forest Service often doesn't extend them very long leases, so many of them won't come in because the investment just doesn't pencil out. They don't have a long-enough access to these forests and to the timber to make their investment pencil.

I wanted to get your thoughts on that if you have heard of that being a problem, as well, and, if so, what you would like to see from the Forest Service.

Mr. CHAPMAN. Contracting is challenging. How we make sure that we take care of all of our loggers is very important for us.

So we may have a family business that a long-term supply over 10 years to them may be 20,000 acres. We have got to make sure they get taken care of. At the same time, we have a big business coming in where a 10-year supply to them might be 200,000 acres. So how do we make sure that all of our workers in this space are being taken care of is challenging. And, you know, I think one of the big lessons of 4FRI is that a large contract was offered in the early days, and it wasn't successful.

So I think there are a lot of parts into this challenging process of contracting that need to come together. Sometimes it is finding that assurance of long-term supply at multiple different scales because, you know, the urgency here really is tough. I don't want any losers in the woods. I want them all to be winners, our family businesses that have been doing this for a long time, the new folks coming in and making big investments, we need them all to be successful.

And so figuring out what that right fit is with the contracting process, I don't think we have that figured out yet, but we sure are trying. And because we have that collaborative NEPA that is completed, we have the space to figure this out. So we are in a good position.

Mr. CRANE. Mr. Chairman, will you allow me one more question?

Dr. GOSAR. I will.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you.

Dr. GOSAR. Be quick.

Mr. CRANE. Can you talk really quickly about grazing, and how that can affect fire mitigation?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Targeted grazing? We talked about this in the Wildfire Commission report. It can play a really important role in providing that surface fuel reduction. The opportunity to go into these strategic areas where we know there is these fire pathways, where the fire is going to move quickly through these areas, we have done the thinning. We have reduced that crown fire risk. Now we have got a fast-moving grass fire risk. How do we reduce that challenge? And so thinking about, you know, targeted grazing opportunities could be a really good opportunity for mitigating that grass fire risk.

Mr. CRANE. And that helps our ranchers at the same time. Is that correct?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Correct.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman from Puerto Rico is going to be recognized for 7 minutes.

Mr. HERNANDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will probably yield some of that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Across the country communities are grappling with the devastating impacts of climate-fueled disasters. From wildfires in the West to hurricanes in the Caribbean in Puerto Rico, where I am from. In these high-risk areas we are seeing a troubling pattern. Insurance markets are becoming unstable, premiums are rising sharply, and coverage is increasingly out of reach.

Puerto Rico knows this story very well. After Hurricane Maria we experienced firsthand the collapse of insurance providers and the long-term consequences of under-insurance. As wildfires now drive similar trends in mainland states, it is clear we need national solutions that ensure resilience, affordability, and equity in disaster recovery.

Mr. Wright, major insurers have limited or stopped issuing new policies in high-risk areas in the United States due to escalating wildfire risks. Puerto Rico faced similar challenges with insurance companies withdrawing or collapsing after disasters like Hurricane Maria. What strategies can be implemented to stabilize insurance markets and ensure continued coverage availability in these high-risk regions?

Mr. WRIGHT. I appreciate the question, sir.

As we look at these pieces, we need to address the risk. Fundamentally, when the risk goes down, the price goes down. I think, for many people, not only have they seen the risk increase, but in much of the country they have seen the value of their homes go up and inflation play out. All of that is also raising the prices

that are there. But if you are the customer, you don't know the difference, you just got the invoice, here is the price that is there.

So particularly as we see property values across the country continue to rise, we need to help them reduce the risk. And then insurance companies need to recognize that and show pricing that connects and recognizes those actions.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. How could we reduce the risk of hurricanes?

Mr. WRIGHT. So we can reduce the risk in terms of the consequence to the built environment. And I will complement. As devastating as Hurricane Maria was across your island, in the rebuilding there has been a tremendous amount of attention to rebuild in ways maybe that can't withstand a Cat 5, but can withstand the Cat 2, the Cat 3, the way they are addressing roofs.

And so I do think the right kinds of actions have been demonstrated there in Puerto Rico.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. All right, thank you. In states like California investigations have revealed that flawed algorithms used by major insurers contribute to widespread under-insurance among wildfire survivors, hindering recovery efforts. Under-insurance is also an issue in Puerto Rico, where many homeowners lack adequate flood insurance to protect their properties. How can we make sure that insurance models accurately assess risks and provide sufficient coverage in disaster-prone areas?

Mr. WRIGHT. I think you are highlighting two separate pieces. Let me talk about general property, and then I will turn to flood. That is a separate piece.

It is the responsibility of the homeowner, the agent, and the company to continue to pay attention to how the value of properties have increased. The real piece about under-insurance is someone whose home was worth \$700,000 5 years ago, it grew in value, it is now worth \$900,000. Did they continue to adjust their insurance coverages to that point? That really needs to be an all-of-the-above place.

As you may be aware, I spent a number of years as the chief executive of National Flood Insurance at FEMA. There is more flaws than we quite know what to do with in that program. But on the under-insurance side for them, they have a ceiling. They don't offer more than \$250,000 worth of structural coverage. That has been mandated by Congress, and hasn't been changed since 1994.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Thank you.

Captain Chapman, in your testimony you note that the Four Forest Restoration Initiative has leveraged over 188 million in timber industry investments and 54 million from partners while maintaining strong community and ecological safeguards. What message does this send about the value of long-term planning in the case of a natural disaster?

Mr. CHAPMAN. You know, I think it sends a message that it works. It is worth the investment.

I will admit, I was a skeptic in the early days of 4FRI, and those very early NEPA meetings were pretty rough, but at the end, when we got through the objection processes, we kind of became a family. It was really important for all of us that had different perspectives, and we still had a shared mission at the end to keep our forests

from burning down, protect our communities. And I think that collaborative process, it really is worth it. And that is how we can do the good work that we have in front of us now, is because of the hard work we put in to get to that collaborative space.

Mr. HERNÁNDEZ. Great. Well, thank you, and thank you all for all the work that you do, and for your openness in answering our questions today.

I yield back. I yield back the 5 minutes that I have left.

[Laughter.]

Dr. GOSAR. The 2 minutes. Go ahead.

Dr. DEXTER. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for yielding your time, Congressman Hernández.

So I just want to note for my future reference, as well as hopefully this Committee's, that this has been a remarkably bipartisan discussion. And I think the panel is in pretty uniform agreement that there are a lot of things we could be doing better. And certainly there are things we have done that maybe needs to go back and be fixed. So I really appreciate that, and look forward to working together with my Committee partners.

Captain Chapman, thank you for your service and for your expertise. Your perspective on how to collaboratively manage forests across the board has been really helpful, and I am grateful for your data-driven, experience-proven perspective. Where should the Federal Government focus our resources and policy work to optimally support solutions like you have been speaking to in Flagstaff on landscapes, air quality, built environment, insurance reform? Like, where do you think the highest yield is for our work?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Well, I have got 148 ideas we put into the Commission report.

[Laughter.]

Dr. DEXTER. Thank you. Thank you for mentioning that.

Mr. CHAPMAN. But, you know, I think, for our community in Flagstaff, maintaining our investments and our partnerships with our Forest Service partners is key. We have got a lot more work to do. We are kind of just getting close to having some targets accomplished at a meaningful scale with both our thinning and our burning, and we need to maintain that. We are kind of on that knife's edge. You know, a couple bad years where we don't quite get the support that we need to be able to award the acres that the industry needs to stay steady could be devastating for us.

But also looking at our built environment, we have had millions of dollars come in to get us where we are with the natural environment. We do not have that kind of capacity to do the work in the built environment right now.

Dr. DEXTER. Great. And thank you for mentioning the Commission's report, because I also heard one of my colleagues mention that there was uniform support for the Fix Our Forests Act. What I heard is that we brought some of the recommendations in, and so I would guess that there might be some work to do yet on that Act in your opinion, is that accurate?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Correct. The Senate version—I think the count was about 50 of the recommendations, so almost a third of the report were included in the Senate version.

Dr. DEXTER. Very good, thank you.

Mr. Weiner, thank you also for being here and for your perspectives. What are some of the current barriers to getting communities to invest in the kinds of mitigation measures that you have been speaking to?

Mr. WEINER. Yes, from the Federal perspective we have had a couple. One is that communities have needed to have a community wildfire prevention plan in place before they could be eligible for funding from the Community Wildfire Defense Program, a program that, while well intended, had some serious shortcomings in terms of implementation. The Fix Our Forests Act would remove that requirement. That was a roadblock to Los Angeles being able to use that funding. And there are additional changes to the bill or to that program that would allow them to use it for the built environment and for adoption of technology like some of the technologies that Chief Munsey and Captain Chapman mentioned earlier.

Dr. DEXTER. Great, thank you.

And Chief Munsey, as someone leading efforts across a large and diverse county, how are you working to scale community-wide mitigation practices especially in those high-risk WUI areas?

Mr. MUNSEY. That is part of the ecosystem that is required to protect our communities. Fire safe councils, Firewise communities, engagement, education. Working with the local municipalities, we have, I think, 66 different communities within our jurisdiction. But making sure the rules and regulations are in place that make sense, the enforcement of those, are all important in this conversation.

Dr. DEXTER. Good. And last—or not lastly, since I have extra time thanks to our Chair, Captain Chapman, you served in the wild. We talked about the Commission and it was established, I will just note for the record, by the IIJA. Some of the Commission's proposals for comprehensive wildfire resilience are reflected in the Senate version as you have spoken to. How essential is it that Congress provide dedicated funding to ensure these programs are not just created on paper, but they are fully operational and impactful?

Mr. CHAPMAN. You know, it is not going to happen without that. I really think that establishing the programs and giving them the capacity to implement the work is so important. And really, building off the success that we have seen at the local level, and taking that nationally, for example, with our clean air program, and really looking at how we scale up the success that we have been having. And without the long-term investments in capacity and those programs, then we are just going to have people going to meetings.

Dr. DEXTER. Yes, I really appreciate that. And I think it is going to be something that this Committee will be struggling with, as funds are always in short supply.

Also, Captain Chapman, based on your work with the Four Forest Restoration Initiative, would you agree that NEPA, when properly resourced and implemented, can support landscape-scale forest restoration?

Mr. CHAPMAN. That has absolutely been our lesson. I understand the challenges in other places where they have not been able to overcome those challenges, and I will be honest, it is local. I don't

have the answers. But I know we had people that were struggling to find compromise, and over time we were able to get there, and we certainly have some lessons learned to share with other communities if they are interested. But yes, I think that is exactly what we have been able to demonstrate, that we get behind a common need and we were able to get that NEPA done.

Dr. DEXTER. Very good. And Mr. Chair, I am just assuming I am going to 7 minutes, is that correct, to use my time?

OK, thank you. I am not going to go over that, I promise.

Chief Munsey, we have heard that many red card positions such as incident commanders, wildfire agency administrators, and strike team leaders have been eliminated at the Forest Service. Can you explain what a red card position is, and why these roles are so critical to national wildfire response and coordination?

Mr. MUNSEY. Yes, red card is a demonstration that you have the experience and the education necessary to fulfill a position, whether it is operational, logistical, fiscal, or planning on large-scale incidents. So the red card is a national system.

As you progress as a firefighter, you are taking classes, you are opening task books, you are going on incidents, you are working with a mentor who is signing off that task book to demonstrate that proficiency. It takes many years for a firefighter to achieve incident commander. There is different levels of incident commanders, type 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, in order. A type 1 incident commander may take you 20 years in your career of dedicated work to be able to receive that certification.

Dr. DEXTER. Thank you.

And Captain Chapman, as a pulmonologist I was particularly struck by your comments on the clean air program in Flagstaff. Can you share how coordination between State and local actors has been structured to ensure that program's success?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Yes. And real quick, just mentioning about the questions about qualifications, the Wildfire Commission called out the time to competency that Chief Munsey just mentioned, that it is concerning. To get some of the qualifications that we need to see people have, it is taking us too long. We have got to accelerate that process somehow to get people those skills. We are not in any way saying we want to diminish those qualifications, we just need to help people get there faster.

Mr. MUNSEY. Let me interject on that real quick. There has been a change in the incident command system to what we call CIMS, or Complex Incident Management Systems, and this is the U.S. Forest Service because they don't have qualified people changing the system to allow people to move up quicker.

The second point I want to make that—on incident management teams, when I first started, there was maybe 30 percent representation from local government, 70 percent from the Federal agencies. That has now flipped. Local government is providing a lot of these positions, including complex incident management, the top layer, because there has been a degradation in these positions. Thank you.

Mr. CHAPMAN. The coordination with our clean air program has been great, working with our county public health department and our Forest Service partners. Basically, we have been finding the

funding to put these tools out into the community, and then working with them to identify the right places to put them.

For example, the air sensor monitoring. If you go onto the PurpleAir.com network, you can see where we have started placing these sensors both indoor and outdoors around the community, and really, they are not regulatory monitoring, it is social monitoring. When we get a call from a concerned member of our community and they say, hey, I know you guys are doing important work out there with the prescribed burn, but there is a lot of smoke in my neighborhood. Is there something I can do? When I tell them, "Well, we have a permit from the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality," that is not a level of service that I think meets their need.

Dr. DEXTER. Yes.

Mr. CHAPMAN. And so being able to provide them with an indoor air filter and just the assurance that, hey, we have got a sensor in your neighborhood, it looks like it is going to be at this level for a couple hours, we can give them the assurance that we are tracking the intensity and the duration of that smoke. It is really important.

Working with the EPA in the program of the public health part of the Wildfire Commission was just a transformative process for me because I used to think, you know, this work is really important, we just need to do it, stop getting in our way. And then I realized that, you know, the work that we are doing is really important, and we just need to be better at communicating what we are doing. We need to be better at providing solutions to mitigate the impacts to the communities that we are working in. And we can't just say it is too important to do that, we need to equalize the impact of our work in both spaces.

Dr. DEXTER. I really appreciate that. And, you know, flagging for kids not to be outside doing practice during that time and just giving people that information makes a huge difference in their health.

So last thing, Mr. Chair, I just ask for unanimous consent to enter four items into the record. I will submit those to you.

Dr. GOSAR. You without objection—

Dr. DEXTER. Thank you.

Dr. GOSAR [continuing]. So ordered.

Dr. DEXTER. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. GOSAR. And now—

Dr. DEXTER. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR [continuing]. I am going to go to the gentlewoman from California, Mrs. Kim, for her 5 minutes.

Mrs. KIM. Thank you, Chairman and Ranking Member, for holding this hearing and allowing me to waive on. Thank you so much, and I also want to thank all of our witnesses for joining us today.

Chief Munsey, good to see you. I want to thank you and all those who are on the front lines for your services. Thank you.

As you know, I represent California's 40th district, which is Southern California. That includes the counties of Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties. So I know all too well how devastating these fires are. The Airport Fire that in my district

that burned over almost 24,000 acres in the Santa Ana mountains last September was devastating, and we are still recovering from it.

Chief Munsey, as you know, the San Bernardino County has a lot of Federal land. And I would like to know more about the roadblocks that you have faced when it comes to working with both the State of California and the Federal Government on wildfire prevention, the management and the recovery efforts. So, in your opinion, could you talk to us about how the local communities and stakeholders can better convene with State and Federal land management agencies so we can better prepare for wildfire and forest management, you know, having those discussions?

Mr. MUNSEY. You know, I think it is likely that, if the Palisades and Eaton hadn't occurred, we would probably be sitting here talking about the Airport Fire, which was burning in conjunction with the Line Fire and the Bridge Fire, which are both in our jurisdiction, at the same time. And it was a very complex environment that we are competing for resources. And at one point during the Bridge Fire, as fire burned in our communities, I had to empty every single one of our fire stations out, every one of them, to go into the community of Wrightwood and Mount Baldy to protect those houses, and that was very hard for me, as local government, because now there is no 911 system.

One of the complex cities that we have right now, specifically to the Federal Government, is the workforce. There has been a lot of retention issues, and some very highly-qualified people have left to go get jobs that provide for their families better. Frankly, CAL FIRE has attracted a lot of them.

So we see a lot of acting positions, people that may be in the position but do not have the authority to make the decisions. And we see new faces a lot. It affects us with our qualification system. And as I have mentioned, the transition in the incident management teams, of having a large Federal presence to much greater local presence, it transitions to the fire stations. In my jurisdiction, only 12 of the 25 fire stations were staffed last year, 12 out of 25, which puts a burden on local government. We respond to 8,533 calls per year into Federal lands without compensation. It is the seasonal workforce, instead of permanent workforce. These are things that I think that are on the table that really affect us with local government.

When it comes to actually working with our neighbors, it really depends on the forest and the supervisor on how much are they going to work with their local partners. Often they focus on maybe legacy projects that somebody proposed a decade or more, and put all their efforts on these projects that may not adequately protect our communities. They focus on maybe some political projects.

Mrs. KIM. I want to get to some other issues, too, so if you don't mind, Chief Munsey.

You know, you know that I introduced the bill, "Wildfire Technology Demonstration, Evaluation, Demonstration, and Optimization," or the DEMO Act. That was already included in the Fix Our Forests Act, and the intent of that bill is to create a pilot program to allow the private entities who are working on developing wildfire technologies to partner with the Federal land

management, and they will be able to test their technologies at scale.

Mr. Weiner, can you answer this question? As an industry insider focusing on wildfire science and technology innovation, what are some of the emerging technologies that you think are promising in helping with the wildfire mitigation?

Mr. WEINER. Yes. So, excuse me, I think that what we are seeing is an explosion of innovative ideas at every phase of fire. So there is no one, but there is a lot of options out there to help us deal with this problem. Chief Munsey and Captain Chapman both mentioned early detection being really critical. There are a lot of novel solutions out there coming out that can help us act on a fire and have better situational awareness right away.

The other piece of this is advanced AI-enabled modeling, right, so that we can actually understand fire behavior, what is happening on the ground, and how a fire is likely to behave, and to get us to a potential world where, as a fire ignites and we rapidly detect it, we can make decisions in near real time about how we need to respond to that fire, where it could be potentially a good fire and we could let it burn, or where it could pose a threat to structures of the environment and we need to act quickly.

We also see a lot of innovative technologies in rapid suppression, whether it is autonomous aviation, like RAIN, I know they have a demonstration planned in your district, and then and then looking at, robotic mastication and other tools like that too, to help us do mitigation work at scale.

Mrs. KIM. Do you see any policy reforms that is needed that you like to see so we can encourage public-private partnerships and ensure that all levels of government: local, State, Federal, and fire agencies, are using all of those innovative tools made by companies like yours?

Mr. WEINER. Yes. So we are strongly supportive of your pilot demonstration project legislation, and we would like to see it continue to be expanded. We are working with our colleagues in the Senate to see if we can expand it to have a role for deployment, as well there, right, to see if the Federal Government can actually use these tools at scale. Because we are at the point where a lot of these technologies have been demonstrated, now we just need to get them into the field of the people who need them, right? And so that is a big piece of this.

And then also, increasingly creating dedicated pots for advanced and innovative wildfire technology is really important. Right now a lot of wildfire tech gets eaten up in the IT budget. It is shared with the Microsoft Office renewal every year, right? And so I think that the Committee has an opportunity to look at creative new funding pots where we can let people deploy these technologies without having to compete against other necessary IT prerogatives.

Mrs. KIM. Perfect. Thank you very much.

Mr. WEINER. Thank you.

Mrs. KIM. My time is up, and I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlewoman. Now it is my turn.

OK, Mr. Munsey, so I live on the end of a cul de sac. It is not me, I don't live at the end of a cul de sac, I live out in the woods, and three sides of this person's house has got Forest Service on

there, and they just got their bill. In fact, they don't have a bill, because they are being dropped because of the Forest Service not taking care of their properties around them. Do you think that is fair?

Mr. MUNSEY. No, I think it is bullshit.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you. How would you approach that?

Mr. MUNSEY. As a landowner?

Dr. GOSAR. Yes.

Mr. MUNSEY. Well, I would go to the local forest, and I would explain the problem, and I would see if I could work with them to do some land management on their jurisdiction. I would offer it for free, knowing that they actually can't accept that, but I would probably do it in writing and then send it to the local newspaper to say my insurance is being canceled, I am working hard on my own private property. Look what I have done. I have fire-resistant—I have met zone zero, I have managed my land, but I no longer can afford here. And probably in your cul de sac, this is generational, people that have lived on this property. So while we have lived here for 100 years in harmony with the natural resources, we no longer can do it because of the cost.

But I would get that in writing and go public on it because, frankly, at the end of the day, I don't think that we are going to get the forest to take action to mitigate or do treatment to protect that particular landowner.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you.

Captain Chapman, so in Flagstaff we almost had to learn our bad lesson before we learned our good lesson, right? We almost lost Flagstaff. It had crested that hill over there south of Little America, we would have lost the town.

So when we say mitigation, it is biodiversedly different from each type of tree, right? Each forest is very different, right?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Correct.

Dr. GOSAR. So is it more the floor the problem in Arizona, or is it more the limbs, dead limbs, or the saturation of trees together that are the problem?

Mr. CHAPMAN. Oh, we got lots of problems.

[Laughter.]

Dr. GOSAR. Well—

Mr. CHAPMAN. It is all those things combining together. You know, this is really where, you know, I think our specialty within our capacity within our program, we are standing in a driveway talking to that homeowner, and each parcel, each driveway has different challenges. It might be the open space behind them that needs some treatment. It might be their own property.

And really, the solution here has to be comprehensive. We have to have that combination of the risk reduction on the natural environment, so going in and doing the thinning in the forest, reducing the ladder fuels, reducing the tree connectivity so if there is a fire, it stays on the ground—but at the same time making sure that homeowner is doing the work they need to do on their property. And it is challenging, because we have folks are surrounded by treatments, they have done the work on their property, and they are still running into those insurance challenges.

So it can't just be one solution. It has got to be a combination. It is going to have to be a combination at scale, and I fear that scale is probably going to be multiple States. That is what it is going to take to look at some of these models and say that risk has been mitigated in a way that actually changes some of the math on these maps. So it has got to be a combination of these solutions, and really, it starts at the parcel level.

Dr. GOSAR. Mr. Wright, through the insurance industry, how would they have access to this information if a landowner is actually doing their job?

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes. So some of it is based on aerial kind of information that they can obtain. And so much of it happens based on what is reported from the homeowner, along with documentation from them. They don't simply say, hey, tell me it is true. The insurance company wants to see the pictures to prove that it is true.

Dr. GOSAR. So AI and some of this Google Earth, really should be beneficial to the insurance industry.

Mr. WRIGHT. It absolutely is. And today it still has probably two principal limits I will speak at.

First of all, it is showing you the top down. It is not as easy to see the diagonals which allow you to see the resolution up closest to the house. Progress is being made there, but that is an element where we are still reliant on the individual homeowners or others to put boots on the ground.

The second piece is, as much progress has been made on wildfire modeling and the kind of progression of fire behavior, one of the most difficult pieces is once it gets to start burning structures. The embers created by structures are even more lethal. When the, you know, motherboard from the TV is on fire and flying, when the hose from the dishwasher is picking up and flying, look at those kind of elements, particularly in those high wind events. That is a place where the modeling and the AI still has a ways to go.

Dr. GOSAR. Got you.

Mr. Chapman, so the advent of new materials that are very flame resistant—I know of one now that is basalt. I mean, they actually can weave it, believe it or not, and they can make panels that are both bulletproof and fireproof. How would that advent change that whole aspect that you would look at as far as fire?

Mr. CHAPMAN. The innovative building materials are a game-changer for us. This also aligns with potentially some of our small-diameter wood utilization strategies around Flagstaff, as well.

So really looking at, you know, this challenge, we are spending time with our community development folks and our building folks within the city. It is not just the fire department that is responsible for fixing these things because we can have partners that come up with wonderful new construction ideas, and if we can't get that built into our code we are going to run into some challenges. So really, working across all these different disciplines and being supportive of new building construction innovations is going to be very important for us.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you. I am going to save my next time until after.

The gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Collins, is recognized for his 5 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS. Oh, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate you all being here today.

I want to start out by saying that my parents were in the trucking business, and we hauled logs for a living. And so from this aspect, especially from forestry lands, I have been affected by the fact that they changed how they sold off timberland. They always said they had timberland for sale in our national forests, but they would sell them in such small plots that it didn't make it profitable for anybody to actually go in there and log it.

And so I want to focus on some things here with Georgia. As a matter of fact—and Mr. Weiner, I would love to start with you. Georgia has faced a substantial increase in wildfires just this year, more than 1,600 fires burning upwards of 14,000 acres. And that is a 20 percent increase on fires and 50 percent more land that has been burned just this year over a 5-year average here for Georgia.

You have said that Federal and State agencies' emphasis on fire suppression has led to dangerously high fuel loads in our woodlands, especially those near woodland-urban interface communities. In fact, the Forest Service has recently warned the public that even rainfall only slightly moderates fire conditions in areas like the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. How has a strategy of reacting to fire, rather than proactively managing our lands, led to these extremely hazardous conditions?

Mr. WEINER. Well thank you, sir. I live in Tennessee, so we have noticed a growth in wildfire risk there. And I will say that the fire exclusion regime that we have had for over 100 years of putting out fires before they necessarily need to be put out—obviously, we did that for important reasons in a lot of cases—has left us with a landscape that cannot adapt to fire in this new reality, right?

And so what we need to do is get into a proactive posture to get in there and manage the forest more effectively. I think this is increasingly important in States with emergent fire risk like Georgia, right? We have States like California, Oregon, and others have been dealing with this problem for a really long time, and have had the benefit of being able to learn from their mistakes, learn from their successes, and build a system over decades. Other States are going to have to jump a lot of hurdles really quickly to catch up, and so I think this presents an opportunity for—

Mr. COLLINS. Well, in that nature, then, how do we educate the public just about the importance of Federal forest management so that they can get in on making sure that we are doing practices like thinning and prescribed burns?

Mr. WEINER. Yes, I think part of it is helping people understand that not all fire is bad. The southeast region is very good at prescribed fire in a lot of ways, compared to the rest of the country. So it is funny, when I am down in the South we hear from a lot of folks who are much more comfortable with the idea of prescribed fire than we do out in the West.

But generally speaking, we need a new approach to Smokey Bear, if you will, that we need more fire on the ground. Not all fire is bad, and we need to embrace that.

Mr. COLLINS. Right. Thank you.

Chief Munsey, you wrote in your testimony that, “As a firefighter, I often question why we wait for wildfire destruction before taking action.” Why do we wait for wildfire destruction before taking action?

Mr. MUNSEY. Well, I think it is local government. We are taking action. And so, in reference to that quote, I was really looking at the Line Fire on the National Forest. And I had demonstrated just before that in the 1930s the road network was there, the control line was there, but, because of policies, those roads were reclaimed by vegetation.

Mr. COLLINS. Well, in your 2003 project to remove hazardous timber and unmanaged fuels within forest areas, what Federal agencies did you coordinate with, and why did you pick those?

Mr. MUNSEY. Yes, nearly all of them. The U.S. Forest Service was the biggest partner. The EPA—we actually had written an EPA grant based on air quality to be able to do that work, which was helpful. Fish and Game, certainly, and Army Corps of Engineers.

Mr. COLLINS. OK. What challenges did you face in coordinating with those agencies, if any, and were they resolved, or how were they resolved?

Mr. MUNSEY. So we were able to, at the time, have a declaration of Federal emergency, which really helped us get through some of those challenges, but then taking an interagency approach. What was interesting is local government took the leadership on this role because it wasn’t clearly defined who was going to take the leadership from the Federal or the State.

The biggest challenge was bringing everybody together, and then cutting through the bureaucracies. I think we did 10,000 different plots in order to remove 1.1 million trees. Initially, every Federal agency needed to be on site, they needed to inspect the plots. Eventually, we were able to defer some of that authority to other agencies, so we were quickly able to go through the different processes, the regulatory environment.

I think today we can do it even better and more efficient with using technology. To the insurance, you know, looking at the top down, there is technology that can use AI that you can stand—

Mr. COLLINS. Yes.

Mr. MUNSEY [continuing]. An individual can stand, a homeowner can stand with their camera, and AI can tell you what good looks like, and verify that for the insurance industry. Why could we not do that same thing for the permitting process?

Mr. COLLINS. Right. So what would you say you were able to accomplish in that project?

Mr. MUNSEY. We saved our forest. When you go and you look at the San Bernardino National Forest now, you don’t see a bug kill. One point 1 million trees and millions of tons of biomass were taken away over a 10-year period. It took an immense amount of leadership.

The gentleman that ran that program I have now brought back to—and I earlier described—an interagency approach to land management. I have asked him to lead that approach, and then teach the newer generation, and then institutionalize it by policy into who we are, not just local government, but State and Federal

Government, so that we maintain that rhythm so 20 years doesn't go past and now we are in the same environment we were.

Mr. COLLINS. So you all are still continuing the project, the coordination with the agencies?

Mr. MUNSEY. That particular project ended in 2010. Today, 15 years later, we are starting to see the overgrowth that led to that bark beetle kill.

Mr. COLLINS. OK, all right

Mr. MUNSEY. The trees per acre is a large reason why that occurred—

Mr. COLLINS. I am sorry, I have run out of time and I forgot we are voting.

I yield back. Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. GOSAR. The gentleman from California, Mr. Fong, is recognized for his 5 minutes.

Mr. FONG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the witnesses for being here.

Unfortunately, megafires are not new to me, nor my community. In 2021, in the Central Valley of California, the KNP Complex fire decimated some of the last remaining giant sequoia groves in and around the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. These trees thrive with fire, but the sheer force and unnatural scale of this megafire proved to destroy even the most resilient, oldest trees in the world.

So building off the Fix Our Forests Act, I introduced the Save Our Sequoias Act to spur the aggressive forest management we need to protect our remaining forests. One of the main sections of this bill declares an emergency to streamline resources.

If I could ask Mr. Wiener, how would more expanded emergency declarations help spur forest management?

And are there other creative ways to achieve our forest treatment goals in an expedited manner?

Mr. WEINER. Yes. I mean, I think we can read the writing on the wall here, and see that Governor Newsom and President Trump, both within the same weekend, announced new emergency authorities to do landscape-scale treatments because executives who are in charge, regardless of party, understand that they need to cut through red tape to get at this problem.

And Sequoias is a really good example of how we have been able to yield results very quickly. They were able to treat about 50 percent of the groves in the 3 years now since emergency authorities were announced to help them move forward, right? And that is something that is absolutely replicable elsewhere, and is a real success story.

Mr. FONG. Thank you for that.

To Mr. Wright, the Borel Fire was the largest fire in Kern County's history—and I am proud to represent that area—and devastated wildland-urban interface communities in my district in the summer of 2024, including the complete destruction of the town of Havilah. Because these communities are small and rural, they did not meet the minimum damage threshold for FEMA aid.

At the same time, insurance rates in California are not attainable, which I am sure you are aware of. With more and more companies eliminating policies or leaving the State altogether, it

leaves our residents with little options besides the California FAIR plan, which is extremely expensive and lacks the true coverage needed for homeowners.

If I can ask you for States like California and probably other states who, hopefully, will not follow our path where insurance—with the insurance market struggling, how do we motivate insurance companies to re-enter the State and re-enter the market, and create more sustainability in the insurance space?

Mr. WRIGHT. Well, as you well know, Prop 103 in California created more complexities in the property insurance market than any other place in the country. While I am hopeful that what Commissioner Lara, the insurance commissioner, has announced, he will be able to follow through and meet those pieces.

Ultimately, there needs to be a reset in the market to bring more folks back. And then we also need to help the homeowners take the actions on their homes so that they are a more attractive risk.

Mr. FONG. I understand that, you know, California is the last State to kind of allow for reinsurance and catastrophic modeling. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes. California, for various reasons that I won't go into the minutia of, didn't allow the price of reinsurance, limited on what could be done on modeling. Commissioner Lara had made some announcements, and they are starting to begin the implementation. It is ironic that, as many things as California might lead the country on this front, it has been at the back of the train.

Mr. FONG. I appreciate that.

Mr. Munsey, during the Borel Fire along with other fires that have impacted our communities over the last few years, we have seen that the Forest Service has been hamstrung with its aerial firefighting capabilities by requiring firefighting aircraft to be monitored by another spotter aircraft. I wanted to get your perspective on how the Forest Service could be better in enacting safety measures that would allow for more successful deployment of aerial resources for fire suppression.

Mr. MUNSEY. Aviation is probably the most dangerous thing that occurs on a wildfire, and aviation coordination is critical. And so I am not against having a lead plane or an air attack, I think those are very important concepts.

Specifically, I think where you hear the objection from local government is the ability to use night-flying helicopters on Federal instances. This past year, the Vista Fire is a great example where we had night-flying helicopters that were available, but because we didn't have a helicopter coordinator that was a State or Federal employee, these night-time critical resources were not able to fly. We did have a local government qualified carded HLCO, and they weren't being used. I called the U.S. Forest Service our local forest, and I volunteered to pay out of my local budget to have that HLCO coordinator that could fly to take action on Federal land, or to keep that fire small so it wouldn't spread to our local communities.

It took 3 days in order to fill that position. Ultimately, they didn't charge me, they did the right thing. But that was very frustrating to us.

Mr. FONG. I appreciate that, and I know, seeing in my community, time is of the essence in terms of addressing these. So I would love to partner with you and get more information.

My time has run out, so I certainly will yield back to the Chairman.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much. I got a quick question for you. federalism. You know, we are supposed to have consultation with local governments, county supervisors, Native American Tribes. How important is that to making your decision, Mr. Munsey?

Mr. MUNSEY. I am not sure exactly what you are talking about, because I don't know that I see that level of coordination occur.

Dr. GOSAR. OK, that is what I was looking for.

How about you, Mr. Chapman?

Mr. CHAPMAN. We have that coordination.

Dr. GOSAR. And it has been very interesting, right? It has been very collaborative. It is not what Flagstaff expected, was it?

Mr. CHAPMAN. I am sorry. Could you repeat that?

Dr. GOSAR. Yes. It is evolution. It was very different, and it is not what Flagstaff had expected, but it has really turned out very well, has it not?

Mr. CHAPMAN. I would agree. I can call up our State and Federal partners at any moment, and we are on the same page. We have coordination calls, and coordination exercises, and we have got a pretty good model of all of us working together, yes.

Dr. GOSAR. That is way cool. So now I am going to take a little different stance.

Assets that you look at when you are fighting fires. Now, in Flagstaff, Mr. Chapman, you have Snowbowl, right? Do you think that is an asset or a hindrance?

Mr. CHAPMAN. I would say it is an asset, considering the water supplies that are up there, and the fact that it is basically firebreaks surrounding a wilderness area, yes.

Dr. GOSAR. You know, the fact that produces snow really is an asset I look at, you know, because it takes a while for the snow to melt, and so it delays that season a little bit. And it also helps to replenish our aquifers a little bit better, does it not?

Mr. CHAPMAN. It sure does. It also puts a lot of values at risk in an area that, you know, is challenging because of the topography for fire response.

Dr. GOSAR. That is way cool. Well, being one of the original people that was doing the 4FRI and working with Tom Tidwell, I tell you what, we spent a lot of time, but we smile when we think about the process.

So now my last question for each one of you. What was the question that you wanted asked? What was the question, and what was the answer to it that was not asked?

We will start with you, Mr. Munsey. What was the question that you were prepared to ask—or to answer, what is it, and what is its answer?

Mr. MUNSEY. That is a good question. I am going to go back to the coordination real quick.

Yes, we absolutely have coordination with the Federal Government on emergency incidents, and I would say very strong.

When it comes to land management coordination, I think that that has been lacking, and we need to fix it.

And I am really happy with what I am hearing in Flagstaff. It comes down, though, I think, to the local supervisors of the forest and the direction that they give. That is apparent to me.

What is the question that I want to ask? I think it is more the recognition that I would like you to understand is that in local government jurisdictions it is your local firefighters that are responding to these incidents, often arriving before the Federal Government, that are taking action and mitigating these incidents. I want you to recognize that it is more than just wildfire. It is all-hazard, that our national forests and our public lands can be very dangerous.

As we move forward in combining the Federal agencies—and I do think that it is a good idea, and I generally support it—there is going to be some redundancies that are going to be eliminated. And I think the importance of local government in supporting the Federal Government in their mission cannot be underscored. But for too long there hasn't been adequate agreements in place that recognize local government's contribution to supporting the Federal agencies in their time of need. And I think that that is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Dr. GOSAR. Mr. Wright?

Mr. WRIGHT. Probably something down the line that if the land management agencies did everything right, what else needs to be done?

And I think we need to address the failure of imagination of people who live in the neighborhoods. Because even when everything goes right, wildfire can make it to the edge of the community. And as soon as the first structures are burning and you have got a high wind day, it is going to keep going. And over and over and over again I walk into communities right after these conflagrations and people go, I just never thought this could happen. And while none of us probably thought about the scale of it, we know what happens when fire gets in.

And both of the chiefs have spoken to elements of addressing the wildland and the attack on that side, but homeowners and neighborhoods have to do things so that they can withstand those wildfire embers when they invade their community.

Dr. GOSAR. Mr. Chapman?

Mr. CHAPMAN. I think you guys did a pretty good job—

[Laughter.]

Mr. CHAPMAN [continuing]. Covering a lot of the questions I was worried about.

But one of the ones that didn't come up directly is, potentially how can a committee or just a Federal organization support our local fire departments and our fire districts in a more effective way when it comes to wildfire response?

And one of the recommendations in the Commission report that I point to a lot was the one about empowering the U.S. Fire Administration to play a larger role in this space. So whether it is their granting abilities through a couple of their granting processes or just increasing the level of training and opportunities specifically for fire departments and fire districts—you know, we often plug

into wildfire response. We can go on wildfire assignments. Most departments get appropriately reimbursed when they do that work. We don't really have aggressive funding and training opportunities for prescribed fire for local fire departments and fire districts, and that could be an opportunity for the Fire Administration to play a role in a space like that.

Dr. GOSAR. Mr. Weiner?

Mr. WEINER. I was hoping to be asked, you know, if we got every dollar of funding that we need, what would our challenges be the next day?

And to me, that is our workforce woes. We cannot fix our forests if there is no one to fix our forests, and I think that can't be overlooked.

It is figuring out the bio-economy piece of this, and how we can bring some value off these lands in a meaningful way to help finance this work going forward in a sustainable and responsible way.

I think lastly—this is something Chief Munsey touched on—we got to figure out how to bring some rational sense to the way we structure our wildfire response and management at the Federal level. We need a unification of services at every level.

And beyond that, we need some more accountability. Right now nobody gets fired when there is a bad fire season because there is 20 other people to point the finger at, and that is a fundamental problem that we need to solve.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, I have got to tell you, it is a very spirited debate here. We have had great conversations back and forth. And, you know, I got to say the impressiveness of our panel is incredible.

Dr. DEXTER. Yes, absolutely.

Dr. GOSAR. So, you know, we showed the practicality on big basis, Federal basis, and insurance. Thank you very much for your process.

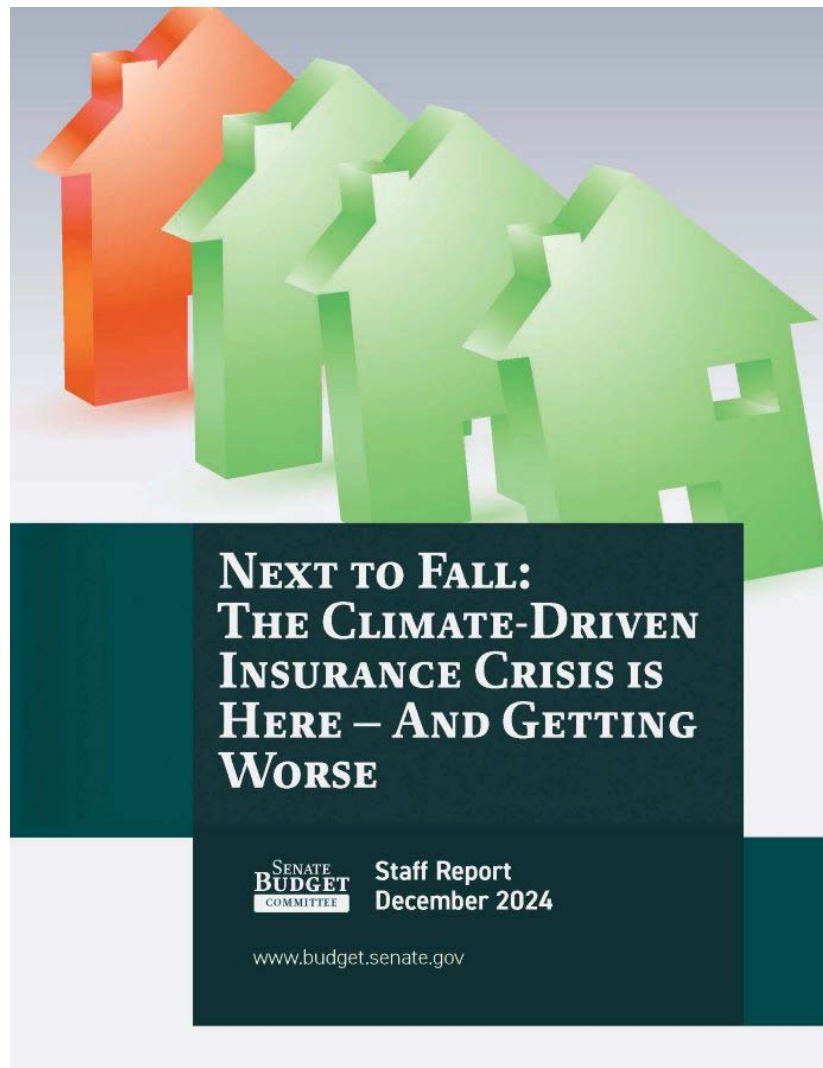
I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony.

Members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. I can tell you that they do. And we will ask you to respond to these in writing. Under Committee rule 3, members of the Committee must submit these questions to the Subcommittee clerk by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, May 20. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for the responses.

If there is no further business, the Subcommittee is adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Dexter



The full document is available for viewing at:
[https://www.budget.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/
next_to_fall_the_climate-
driven_insurance_crisis_is_here_and_getting_worse.pdf](https://www.budget.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/next_to_fall_the_climate-driven_insurance_crisis_is_here_and_getting_worse.pdf)

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-02314-0>

Anthropogenic climate change contributes to wildfire particulate matter and related mortality in the United States

Check for updates

Beverly E. Law^{1,6,7} , John T. Abatzoglou^{2,6,7} , Christopher R. Schwalm^{2,6,7}, David Byrne^{3,6}, Neal Fann^{4,6} & Nicholas J. Nassikas^{5,6,7}

Climate change has increased forest fire extent in temperate and boreal North America. Here, we quantified the contribution of anthropogenic climate change to human mortality and economic burden from exposure to wildfire particulate matter at the county and state level across the contiguous US (2006 to 2020) by integrating climate projections, climate-wildfire models, wildfire smoke models, and emission and health impact modeling. Climate change contributed to approximately 15,000 wildfire particulate matter deaths over 15 years with interannual variability ranging from 130 (95% confidence interval: 64, 190) to 5100 (95% confidence interval: 2500, 7500) deaths and a cumulative economic burden of \$160 billion. Approximately 34% of the additional deaths attributable to climate change occurred in 2020, costing \$58 billion. The economic burden was highest in California, Oregon, and Washington. We suggest that absent abrupt changes in climate trajectories, land management, and population, the indirect impacts of climate change on human-health through wildfire smoke will escalate.

Climate change has driven the observed increase in frequency and intensity of wildfires¹, which produce substantial amounts of fine particulate matter (wildfire PM_{2.5}). Exposure to PM_{2.5} is a known cause of mortality and cardiovascular disease and is linked to onset and worsening of respiratory conditions². Ongoing trends of increasing wildfire severity align with climate projections and underscore how climate change factors such as earlier snowmelt, intensified heat waves³, and rising vapor pressure deficit⁴, have already expanded forest fire extent⁵, accelerated daily fire growth rates⁶, and enabled more extreme fire events⁷.

As climate change exacerbates wildfire risk, PM_{2.5} emissions from wildfires have surged, contributing nearly half of the national annual average PM_{2.5} across the US in recent years⁸ and reversing air quality improvements in several regions⁹. Economic and environmental impacts of wildfires on both natural ecosystems and human communities will continue to increase as climate warming intensifies and extreme events become more frequent¹⁰. Although the connection between anthropogenic PM_{2.5} exposure and mortality is well-documented¹¹, our understanding of the health impacts of wildfire PM_{2.5} attributable to anthropogenic climate change is limited. With

increasing wildfire activity driven by climate change¹, there is a pressing need to quantify the health consequences of subsequent increases in wildfire PM_{2.5} concentrations.

Addressing this need requires attribution, a framework that determines the extent to which human activities, particularly the emissions of greenhouse gases, are responsible for changes in environmental systems. Climate attribution has already been used to link recent high profile fire seasons to climate change. For example, during Black Summer, Australia's 2019–2020 bushfires burned an estimated 24 million hectares; high-risk conditions conducive to widespread burning were at least 30 percent more likely due to climate warming¹². More recently, the 2023 Canadian forest fires covered seven times the average annual area burned compared to the previous four decades¹³, and climate change more than doubled the likelihood of extreme fire weather conditions in Eastern and Southwestern Canada¹⁴. In the western US, observed warming and drying, particularly increased vapor pressure deficit (VPD), correlate with increases in fuel aridity metrics and wildfire burn area (BA). These trends have been linked to anthropogenic climate change in the western

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The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II15/20250515/118173/HHRG-119-II15-20250515-SD010.pdf>



Wildland-urban fire disasters aren't actually a wildfire problem

David E. Calkin^{1,3}, Kimiko Barrett⁴, Jack D. Cohen^{5,6}, Mark A. Finney⁷, Stephen J. Pyne^{8,9}, and Stephen L. Quarles⁷



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Consider several of the most devastating fire disasters of the last century. In August 2023, the wildfire-initiated urban conflagration of Lahaina, Hawaii, damaged or destroyed more than 2,200 structures and killed 98 people. In December 2021, the Marshall Fire sparked conflagrations in Superior and Louisville, Colorado, destroying 1,084 structures and killing two. In September 2020, the Almeda Drive Fire in the communities of Talent and Phoenix, Oregon, destroyed 2,600 homes and killed three. In November 2018, the Camp Fire initiated ignitions in Paradise, California, destroyed 18,804 buildings, and killed 85. In November 2016, fires spread through Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, destroying 2,460 structures and killing 14.¹

These fire disasters burned in vastly different environments. But all had human causes (power lines contributed to at least three), were near communities, occurred during extreme wind events, then inflicted their damage as urban conflagrations. Almost all destruction occurred within the first 12 hours after ignition. These fires immediately overwhelmed wildland and structural firefighting efforts, which were largely ineffective during the initial and extreme phase of the fire. Further, all these fires occurred since 2016. It's clear that structures and whole communities were vulnerable to ignition and burning—irrespective of what initiated the fires.

Society largely regards the wildfire problem as the destruction of human communities. Collectively, disaster fires, such as those mentioned here, have been

Major fires like this one, a damaging wind-fueled fire near Superior, Colorado, in December 2021, are typically defined as an issue of wildfires that involved houses. In reality, they are urban fires initiated by wildfires. That's an important distinction by image credit: iStock/milehightraveler.

Author contributions: D.E.C., K.B., J.D.C., M.A.F., S.J.P., and S.L.Q. wrote the paper.

The authors declare no competing interest.

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Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this work are those of the authors and have not been endorsed by the National Academy of Sciences.

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¹Quarles

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The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II15/20250515/118173/HHRG-119-II15-20250515-SD008.pdf>

ON FIRE: The Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission



September 2023

The full document is available for viewing at:

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf>

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Calvert

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. KEN CALVERT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Chair Gosar, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, and Members of the Subcommittee:

As a proud cosponsor of the *Fix Our Forests Act*, I submit this statement for the record to underscore the urgent need for comprehensive forest management reform and to support the ongoing work to recover from and prevent catastrophic wildfires.

My home state of California has borne the brunt of increasingly frequent and severe wildfires, with devastating consequences for our communities, ecosystems, and economy. As we examine the federal response to wildfire aftermaths, we need to dramatically reform the pace and scale of forest management and wildfire mitigation activities undertaken by the U.S. Forest Service.

The *Fix Our Forests Act*, introduced by Chairman Westerman, presents a pragmatic and science-driven approach to forest management. It builds on lessons learned from past disasters and includes critical provisions to expedite hazardous fuels reduction, improve post-fire recovery, and strengthen coordination between federal, state, and local partners. The legislation's expansion of post-fire emergency authorities and the prioritization of salvage operations are essential to helping communities recover swiftly and safely. Moreover, the litigation reform and streamlining of environmental reviews for post-fire recovery projects are vital to restoring landscapes and mitigating future risks.

Our forests are national treasures, and protecting them requires proactive, sustained action. The *Fix Our Forests Act* is a meaningful step toward achieving healthy, resilient forests and safer communities. I commend the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing and look forward to continuing our bipartisan efforts to combat the wildfire crisis.

