



COMMITTEE ON

**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas**

*Full Committee Hearing - The State of Federal Wildland Fire Science: Examining Opportunities for Further Research & Coordination*

June 29, 2021

---

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, for holding this hearing. Today's hearing is timely as we enter the summer months which have traditionally marked the beginning of wildfire season. However, I am sure many of my western colleagues would agree that there is really not much of a true wildfire season anymore, with fires occurring year-round.

Last year brought haunting images of devastating wildfires across the West. This year unfortunately could be even worse. The National Interagency Fire Center reports that the number of fires and acres burned to date are ahead of last year's figures. Given the ongoing drought covering much of the west, it is reasonable to conclude that this year's wildfire statistics could be historic.

Wildfire is an important part of the ecosystem and often occurs naturally. Many plant species rely on wildfire for their growth and regeneration processes and many animal species look to recently burned lands for their habitat. However, lengthier droughts, hotter temperatures, and poorly maintained federal lands are all contributing to a greater frequency and intensity of wildfires across the country and around the world, which is problematic. Additionally, the increased number of people who live in the wildland-urban interface – the area where residential neighborhoods meet wooded areas – has created the need for a different allocation of resources.

While wildfires represent a threat to life and property, they also have devastating environmental impacts, ranging from polluted watersheds to increased carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere.

We tend to think of the West as being the most vulnerable to wildfire, but this is an issue for us all. Resources spent combatting wildfire by our federal land management agencies are resources which could be spent on revenue generating recreational activities and are a diversion of attention away from other local emergency response needs.

Several agencies within our committee's jurisdiction have a role in combatting wildfire, whether it is NASA providing earth imaging data or NOAA incident meteorologists

helping firefighters plot the best path to fight an ongoing fire. Other agencies such as NSF and NIST engage in research on different aspects of wildfire behavior and how we can better fireproof structures. But we must be certain that all the work of these agencies is carried out in a coordinated manner and is being effectively put into operation by agencies such as the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before us today. I'm especially pleased to welcome George Geissler, who is currently the Washington state forester. He was previously state forester of Oklahoma and can speak to the impacts of wildfire in different parts of our country. I look forward to hearing his thoughts on where there are gaps in federal research, how we can improve coordination among federal agencies, and what actions we can take which would be most beneficial to him and all on-the-ground wildfire responders. I know this is a busy period for him, especially given the record-breaking temperatures most of the West faced this past weekend, and I thank him for taking the time to share his extensive experience with the committee.

Thank you and I yield back.