U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Enhancing Fire Weather Prediction and Coordination

July 12, 2023

Good morning. Thank you to Chairman Lucas for holding this important hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for coming to share your expertise on this topic of utmost importance with us today.

Every year, wildfires take lives and cause billions of dollars in damage. Perhaps most concerning is that the frequency and destructiveness of wildfires are increasing due to climate change.

Coming from California, I see the impacts of wildfires on communities first-hand. In 2020, Santa Clara County, which is part of my Congressional District, experienced the fourth largest wildfire in California state history. The SCU Lightning Complex Fire burned over 396,000 acres, destroyed 225 structures, damaged a further 26 structures, and injured 6 people. Thanks to the brave emergency responders the fire was contained with no fatalities.

Despite the critical role emergency responders and wildland firefighters play in protecting lives and property – and the considerable danger they put themselves in to do so – they are still significantly under resourced.

Support for our firefighters is far from the only challenge when it comes to reducing risks from wildland fires. Many agencies and organizations from the local to federal level play a role in mitigating and responding to wildfires, posing challenges for interagency coordination and efficient use of finite resources. At the Federal level, while there is coordination when it comes to wildfire response, there are significant gaps in coordination when it comes to increasing scientific understanding, prediction, resilience, and communication for wildland fires. We can't just keep responding to disasters. We must invest more in preventing them where we can. That is why I am reintroducing this week the National Wildland Fire Risk Reduction Program Act. This bill would strengthen the federal coordination of research and operational efforts across multiple federal science agencies, and support a more efficient and effective whole-of-government response to reducing wildland fire risk. I look forward to working with Chairman Lucas to move a bipartisan package of wildland fire bills through the Committee this Congress.

Some of the most important information for wildfire detection, mitigation, and emergency response comes from observational systems and predictive models. While mountains of data are currently collected from assets owned and operated across the academic, private, and public sectors, there are still considerable gaps in data. For example, many datasets lack the desired

spatial and temporal resolution for maximum utility in modeling applications. Wildfire forecasting models also need to be improved to better predict wildfire ignition and behavior. Coupled fire-weather models, which integrate our best understanding of the physics of fire and interactions between fire and weather are promising tools for improving real-time predictions of fire behavior. I am excited to hear from one of my constituents, Dr. Tohidi, who is an expert in coupled fire-weather modeling, about how Congress can help support innovations in observational data and wildfire predictive modeling. The increasing threat wildfires pose to our communities and to our brave firefighters on the front lines requires our nation to effectively understand and predict fires, manage our wildlands, and safely and expediently respond to them.

I greatly look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how Congress can support these endeavors. Thank you to our committee members and witnesses for joining us today to engage in this important discussion. I yield back.