



Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing
Enhancing Fire Weather Prediction and Coordination

July 12, 2023

Good morning and welcome to today's Full Committee hearing examining fire weather prediction tools and capabilities.

Today's discussion will help us assess the collaboration and coordination between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), other Federal departments and agencies, and state and local officials to ensure the safety of people and property.

Today's hearing is timely as we enter the summer months, which have traditionally marked the beginning of wildfire season.

However, I'm sure many of my western colleagues would agree that there is not much of a true wildfire season anymore, with fires occurring year-round.

In 2022 alone, the National Interagency Fire Center reported almost 69,000 fires that burned 7.5 million acres of land in the United States. Over the past month, the United States has had some of the worst air quality numbers in the world due to the smoke from Canadian wildfires.

By advancing our fire weather capabilities, we have the chance to limit the size and scope of future fires, as well as improve research into air quality changes that come from fires.

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.

There is no silver bullet to completely prevent fires, but we can make significant progress in protecting our communities if we improve the forecasting and prediction of weather conditions that lead to fires.

Our witnesses today are involved with state emergency management, commercial sector innovation, and academic research to enhance the sustainability and accuracy of fire weather information.

Their testimony will inform our work on legislation to better prepare communities and regions facing the rapid spread of fires.

Let me be clear, the objective of this hearing, and any future legislation related to wildfires, is not for the Federal government to make decisions for people.

But by providing state and local emergency managers the most accurate information possible, the Federal government will be able to give local community leaders and everyday citizens the knowledge and understanding they need to make their own decisions.

NOAA and the National Weather Service cannot tackle this problem on their own. Long gone are the days of fire watchers sitting in towers with binoculars scanning for smoke.

A robust partnership with the commercial sector is necessary to help bolster our forecasting and prediction abilities. I look forward to hearing about the advancements that the commercial sector has made with new technologies, including unmanned aerial aircraft. These are the types of innovations that will inevitably save the lives of firefighters and other emergency officials.

Today's hearing is important because it allows us to examine a wide range of sectors that partner with Federal departments and agencies to utilize different types of fire weather data. Their input will help us ensure the direction and resources we provide to NOAA end up benefiting the most Americans and avoid wasteful duplication.

I thank our witnesses for sharing their expertise with us and I look forward to a productive discussion.