

**Testimony of Congressman Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-05)**

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Member Hearing on Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2019  
Wednesday, April 18, 2018

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Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

Thank you for holding this session today. As a member of the Natural Resources Committee and as Vice Chair of the Agriculture Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on funding decisions made in this important subcommittee.

By way of background, my district makes up roughly 24 percent of the landmass of Pennsylvania and is among the most rural districts east of the Mississippi River. Agriculture, oil and gas production, manufacturing, mining, timbering and recreation are among our top economic drivers throughout the region.

The region is also home to the world’s first commercial oil well – Drake Well in Titusville, Pennsylvania - and the birthplace of the petroleum industry. Due to this history, the Oil Region National Heritage Area, as recognized by the National Park Service, was established in 2004.

With this in mind, I’d like to first express my great support for heritage areas. It is important that we continue to recognize the history of these areas that directly shaped our nation and build our communities.

Northwestern Pennsylvania is also home to the Commonwealth’s only national forest. Four of my counties make up the Allegheny National Forest, where we have had energy production since Col. Drake, high-value timbering and recreation.

As this subcommittee knows well, wildfire costs have skyrocketed in the past two decades, burning up 6.7 million acres per year on average since 2000. With the Forest Service spending some \$2.4 billion in 2017, last year was the costliest fire season on record.

In addition to the significant challenges of firefighting itself, national forests around the nation continue to have great difficulties performing essential activities due to budget cuts as a result of fire transfers. That being said, I appreciate the Committee’s support for a fire fix and additional management authorities that were contained in the recent FY18 omnibus.

Like many national forest regions in the West, the lack of timbering in the Allegheny directly undermines our local economy, as well as my four counties that lose out on funding for essential

services. We can increase our timber output, but that won't happen without the necessary funding or direction from Congress.

In order to support management activities, and especially timbering in national forests, I request full funding for the National Forest System (NFS), as well as for Forest Products & Timber Sales, Capital Improvement & Maintenance, and Forest Roads.

I also again request that the Committee include report language calling for the Forest Service to specifically meet each forest plan's harvesting levels. Necessary funding for such management activities – including timbering and thinnings – is essential for forest health and in order to help prevent wildfires.

The Forest Service is doing important work to research invasive species, diseases and forest health as well; and I've seen this great work firsthand in my district.

This work is fundamental in helping to deal with existing forest health problems and anticipating emerging ones before they exacerbate. Therefore, I request much needed funding for Forest Service research activities, specifically for Forest & Rangeland Research, as well as for State & Private Forestry.

I would like to register my support for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program. This program provides necessary services to counties with tax-exempt federal lands by directly offsetting lost tax revenue. I fully support this program and respectfully request that the Subcommittee do the same.

Finally, I would like to express my support for the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Fund pilot program. Abandoned Mine Lands have caused considerable environmental challenges throughout Appalachia for generations. While we have made significant strides in restoring these lands since 1977, much more work needs to be done. The Office of Surface Mining estimates that unfunded liabilities of abandoned mine lands across the nation is at least \$10 billion, with more than half of these needs in Pennsylvania.

To supplement current AML funding, Congress has appropriated additional funds in the past to help states with the most severe needs. I respectfully request that the Subcommittee continue this support and fully fund the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund pilot program – along with efforts to reclaim our historic abandoned mine lands.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony to the committee. I look forward to working with you as the Appropriations process continues to move forward for Fiscal Year 2019.