



Opening Statement of Ranking Member Westerman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Forest Conservation in the Fight Against Climate Change”
May 12, 2022

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss “forest conservation in the fight against climate change.” As the only licensed forester in Congress, I’m thrilled that forests are finally getting the recognition they deserve as the best solution we have to addressing climate change. As of May 2021, there were 419 parts per million of carbon in the atmosphere. There’s a common saying I’m fond of, which is: “Trees are the answer. Now what’s your question?” As the lungs of the Earth, trees are not just our solution to addressing climate concerns, but creating new wildlife habitat, clean air and water, new jobs, and abundant outdoor recreation opportunities.

That’s why I re-introduced the Trillion Trees Act last year, with over 100 bipartisan cosponsors. The global One Trillion Trees Initiative, spearheaded by the World Economic Forum, aims to grow, restore and conserve one trillion new trees across the globe. Research shows that this would sequester 205 gigatons of carbon, which is equivalent to roughly two-thirds of the carbon emitted since the beginning of the industrial revolution. This is also the exact same amount of carbon emitted as a result of global deforestation over the entire 1850-2019 period.

The Trillion Trees Act makes us a leader in this global initiative by enhancing our existing international forestry programs to include carbon sequestration and creating an International Forest Foundation. We don’t need to spend billions of dollars to solve this problem. We need to lead by example and utilize existing programs to bolster forest conservation efforts at home and abroad.

Forest conservation internationally is not just about preventing deforestation. It’s about promoting the healthy cycle of forest management, which also includes proper reforestation and utilization of wood products. Encouraging countries to lock up their forests and throw away the key is not true conservation, it’s preservation. I’d like to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a recent Washington Post article entitled “Massive Wildfires Helped Fuel Global Forest Losses in 2021.” According to this article, fires accounted for more than one-third of our tree cover losses last year, which is record breaking.

Forest conservation and forest fires are not just an international issue. How can the United States be a leader in global forest conservation when we are burning up millions of acres of our own forest land year after year? Last year, over 7 million acres burned in catastrophic wildfires. The year before that, we lost a record shattering 10 million acres. Along with turning these forests into burnt-out moonscapes, these fires released approximately 130 million metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere over the course of a few months, which is equivalent to driving over 28 million cars on the road for an entire year.

That's why the Trillion Trees Act doesn't just promote reforestation, but also promotes proper forest management and the utilization of forest products so that we can get our wildfire crisis under control. This will also allow us to become less dependent on hostile foreign nations like Russia and Belarus, who we imported more than half-a-billion dollars-worth of wood products from last year. If we produce these products in the United States, not only will that create new jobs and economic opportunities, but will also make sure that these products are being produced under actual environmental standards.

I'll end where I started: trees are the answer to all of our questions. There's a bipartisan opportunity to not only enhance our nation's forests, but forests around the globe. And the Trillion Trees Act is the first step.

Thank you, I yield back.