



**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bruce Westerman**  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
Oversight Hearing on “Examining the Potential  
for a Civilian Climate Corps”  
July 20, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Neguse. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on the Civilian Climate Corps and the proposals surrounding this new concept.

However, I’d be remiss if I didn’t point out that this Committee is going to examine proposals to spend billions of taxpayer money to support initiatives that the private sector is already implementing at a time when the West is literally on fire. We’ve already burned over 1 million acres this year, an astonishing 33% increase compared to this time last year. This is especially troubling when you consider that last year was the 2<sup>nd</sup>

worst fire season we've had in the last 50 years and that our current historic drought conditions out West are expected to only exacerbate this growing crisis.

While Committee Democrats might think they have checked the box on this problem because they held a sole hearing earlier this year, Committee Republicans know our work is far from done. That's why Republicans will be holding a forum two days from now on our worsening wildfire crisis as well as tangible solutions to prevent wildfires and restore the health and resiliency of our nation's forests.

Our forum will feature Montana Governor and former Committee member Greg Gianforte, who was excluded by the White House earlier this year during discussions about wildfire preparedness. We will also hear perspectives from former administration officials, local representatives, sportsmen's groups, and Tribal partners who are all deeply concerned about

the health of our nation's forests and the mounting devastation they are seeing as a result of wildfires, drought, insects and disease.

That's also why I will be introducing the Resilient Federal Forests Act later this week. This bipartisan bill will expedite environmental analyses, address obstructionist litigation, and give the Forest Service the tools they need now to make our overgrown, diseased, and fire-prone forests healthier and more resilient. I hope that more of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will join me in this effort. The science has overwhelmingly told us that there is a dire need to manage our federal lands more actively, and it is a deep disservice to each one of our constituents to delay action and let our beloved forests go up in smoke.

With that being said, I am looking forward to hearing from our expert panel of witnesses today.

The Administration has yet to release its strategy for how the proposed Civilian Climate Corps will be implemented or how this new program will interact with existing corps or federal workforce programs. I'm hoping that our panelists will shed some light on this since we also don't have a witness from the Biden Administration with us today to explain the details of their proposal.

This is a topic that is personal to my own family. My grandfather was enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps and worked on projects around Hot Springs National Park and in the Ouachita National Forest. We still enjoy the benefits of the recreation areas, hiking trails, and bridges that he and his fellow corps members built.

While I am extremely proud of my grandfather's work, we now have private corps programs that have been established for decades and simply recreating the success of the Civilian Conservation Corps won't be easy. We should avoid creating a new federal bureaucracy and instead focus on creating win-win solutions by leveraging private funding and targeting future corps work on important activities like rebuilding trails, addressing deferred maintenance, and conducting active forest management projects.

Finally, if my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are truly interested in promoting climate resilience and creating workforce capacity, I would once again like to remind them that I have a simple solution for them: sign onto and move the "Trillion Trees Act." I re-introduced this bipartisan bill earlier this year, and to date it has over 100 bipartisan cosponsors.

Committee Republicans stand ready to rise to this occasion, and I remain hopeful that we will be able to work with our Democratic colleagues to achieve the type of meaningful actions included in the Trillion Trees Act.

With that, I look forward to hearing the testimony today and yield back the balance of my time.