

**Chair Neguse Opening Statement**  
**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands**  
**Oversight Hearing on Wildfire Management, Ecosystem Restoration, and**  
**Resilient Communities: Examining Implementation of the Bipartisan**  
**Infrastructure Law**  
**April 5, 2022**

- Thank you all for being here today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands oversight hearing on implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- I'm happy to be back here in the Committee room today to host this hybrid hearing on a topic I know merits a high level of interest from members on both sides of the aisle, and is of particular importance to the communities in my state.
- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a historic investment in our country's infrastructure, which included billions for the Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service to support natural infrastructure, reduce wildfire risk, restore healthy ecosystems, and build safe, resilient communities.
- In my district in Colorado, communities from the Front Range to the Continental Divide have been deeply impacted by unprecedented wildfires in recent years, including the Marshall Fire in December 2021.
- The reality we're living with throughout the West is that wildfires are not just contained to a season, but burn year-round in larger areas at higher intensity, and this is only projected to increase as a result of climate change.
- That is why, as Chair of this Subcommittee, I have prioritized wildfire oversight and legislation, including hearings on Build Back Better, natural disasters and climate change, Civilian Climate Corps, public lands workforce, and, yes, even forest management.
- For example, the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Act, which I was proud to introduce alongside Senator Bennet, was included and funded in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- As with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and more recently, the Forest Service' 10-Year Wildfire Plan, the goal is to promote more fire-adapted landscapes and reduce the vulnerability of at-risk communities.

- To that end, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law combines investments in hazardous fuels, prescribed fire, and fuel breaks alongside programs to reform the wildfire workforce and increase firefighter pay, improve community wildfire defenses, and support more science-based monitoring and ecosystem restoration.
- The infrastructure law also funds wildfire response and pre-planning workshops, burned area recovery, and significantly increases funding available through the Reforestation Trust Fund.
- Beyond federal lands, the BIL includes critical investments to enable an ‘all-lands’ landscape-scale approach to wildfire preparedness.
- This multi-layered approach provides land management agencies with a generational opportunity to demonstrate a paradigm shift away from commercial management and emergency suppression, and towards fire adaptation and ecosystem services.
- In this regard, some of the primary implementation questions for the Natural Resources Committee include:
  - Evaluating adequacy of these investments in the context of annual appropriations,
  - Measuring success beyond board feet and acres treated, and
  - Assessing if additional investments, workforce, or policy changes are needed.
- While I recognize there is genuine bipartisan interest in these issues, it’s unfortunate that every current Republican Member of this Committee voted against the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
- Committee Republicans have consistently opposed bipartisan investments and programs to address climate change, conservation, wildfire, biodiversity, and workforce needs, including those germane to today’s hearing.
- Fortunately, there is some good news on the workforce front: I would like to thank the Biden administration and the witnesses here for their efforts to ensure no federal wildfire firefighter makes less than \$15 an hour, while working to address mental health needs and other line-of-duty hazards.
- I understand we can expect some clarity on the ‘wildland firefighter’ classification by May, and I hope we can continue to work together on *Tim’s Act*— my legislation that establishes a minimum wage for federal firefighters, and provides incentives and benefits needed to support and retain an effective federal wildland firefighter workforce.

- Lastly, I'd like to thank our witnesses from the Administration for joining us in-person today. I know there is a lot moving with the FY23 budget, implementation of FY22 Omnibus, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and we appreciate your time today.
- As you know these investments are of the utmost importance to the Members of this Committee and we all have a vested interest in transparent, effective, and efficient implementation of the law.

I forward to your testimony, and I yield back the remainder of my time.

Ranking Member Fulcher, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.