



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: Subcommittee on Federal Lands Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Federal Lands Staff – Aniela Butler (Aniela@mail.house.gov),
Brandon Miller (Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov), and William Kelleher
(William.Kelleher@mail.house.gov); x6-7736
Date: Monday, September 8, 2025
Subject: Oversight Hearing on “*The State of Our Nation’s Federal Forests*”

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “*The State of Our Nation’s Federal Forests*” on **Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at 10:15 a.m. in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building**. Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez (Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, September 8, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

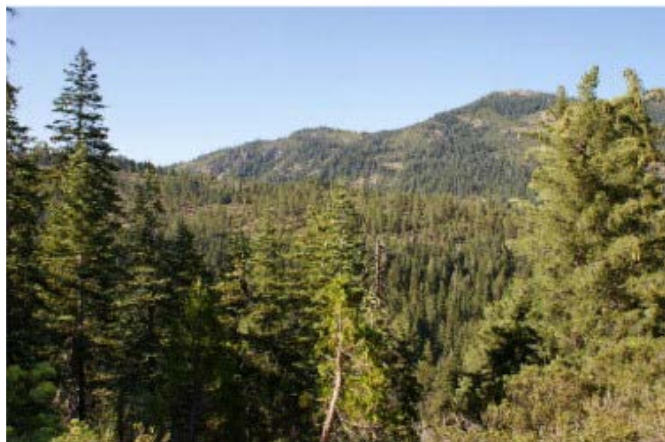
- Over the past several years, our nation has experienced some of the largest, deadliest, and most expensive wildfires in history. A lack of active management, a century of fire suppression, and unprecedented drought conditions have turned our federal forests into dangerous tinderboxes.
- President Trump and Congressional Republicans are advancing policies that will immediately increase timber production, improve forest health, quickly suppress wildfires, and support our nation’s brave wildland firefighters.
- In the wake of the devastating Los Angeles Fires, the House overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan “Fix Our Forests Act.” This comprehensive, bipartisan legislation restores forest health, increases resiliency to catastrophic wildfires, and protects communities by expediting environmental analyses, reducing frivolous lawsuits, and increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration projects.
- President Trump’s executive orders on “Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production” and “Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response” represent the decisive leadership and vision necessary to turn the tide against this historic wildfire crisis. Congressional Republicans have already acted to codify portions of these executive orders through the passage of H.R. 1, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act.”

II. WITNESS

- **Mr. Tom Schultz**, Chief, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

III. BACKGROUND

The State of Our Nation's Forests



Lassen Volcanic National Park in 1925 (top) and 2009 (bottom). **Source:** Perry et al., 2011.

Across the country, more than one billion acres are at risk of wildland fire.¹ Federal land management agencies have identified approximately 117 million acres of federal land at high or very high risk of wildfire, representing nearly one-fifth of the total land overseen by those agencies.² These high-risk federal forests are overstocked with hazardous dry fuels accumulated from over a century of fire suppression, combined with a lack of thinning, prescribed burns, and mechanical treatments.³ Overstocking makes forests less resilient by increasing competition among trees for the water, minerals, and sunlight necessary to sustain a healthy forest. California, which saw over 4 million acres burn in 2020, including in a record-breaking “gigafire” (a term referring to a blaze that consumes more than 1 million acres), exemplifies this situation.⁴ Before European settlement, California’s forests supported roughly 64 trees per acre. Those same forests now have over 300 trees per acre.⁵ As a result, over 173 million trees died across the state in the past 20 years.⁶

Over the last 20 years, the United States lost an average of 7 million acres annually to catastrophic wildfires, more than double the average seen during the 1990s.⁷ Between 2000 and

¹ Testimony of Christopher French, Deputy Chief, U.S. Forest Service, before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, June 24, 2021, <https://www.energy.senate.gov/services/files/AAF7DF40-2A47-4951-ADA4-4B124AD3894F>.

² Hoover, Katie, “Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020),” October 28, 2020, CRS, R46583.

³ Ingram, Robert G., “Robert G. Ingram: Forest Fuel Management - the Ugly Truth.” *TheUnion.com*, October 9, 2020, www.theunion.com/opinion/columns/robert-g-ingram-forest-fuel-management-the-ugly-truth/.

⁴ CNN, “California fire is now a ‘gigafire,’ a rare designation for a blaze that burns at least a million acres, 10/6/20, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/06/us/gigafire-california-august-complex-trnd/index.html>.

⁵ Data provided by the U.S. Forest Service.

⁶ Fehely, Devin, “California drought leading to tens of millions of trees dying in state,” CBS News, July 25, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/california-drought-leading-to-tens-of-millions-of-trees-dying-in-state/>. CNN, “Drought and disease in California forests leaves behind an estimated 36 million dead trees, survey finds,” 2/10/2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/10/us/california-drought-millions-trees-dead/index.html> (observing that “California’s forests are overgrown” after “more than a century of suppressing fires”).

⁷ Congressional Research Service, “Wildfire Statistics”, Katie Hoover, June 1, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search&guid=b82a4d954677449b918a65ece823396f&index=0>.

2024, more than 176 million acres were damaged by wildfires, an area roughly four times the size of North Dakota.⁸ Unprecedented drought facing the western United States has further weakened overgrown national forests, leaving them extremely vulnerable to wildfire. Recent research has shown that some areas are experiencing the driest conditions in 1,200 years.⁹ Together, these circumstances have turned vast swaths of the nation's forests into ticking time bombs that could ignite with a single spark. It is no longer a matter of "if" these areas will experience catastrophic wildfire, but "when."

This crisis has wreaked unprecedented havoc on landscapes and communities across the western United States. Catastrophic wildfires have destroyed lives and property, degraded air and water quality, and irreparably damaged millions of acres of wildlife habitat. A new study found a 246 percent increase in



The ruins of Altadena, CA, in the aftermath of the Eaton Fire.

Source: LA Times, 2025.

the number of homes and properties destroyed between 2010 and 2020 when compared to the prior decade.¹⁰ Prior to 2015, the United States had never had more than 10 million acres burned in a single wildfire season. In the past decade, however, the country has now hit that ominous mark three times during some of the worst wildfire seasons on record (2015, 2017, and 2020).¹¹ In the past two years alone, the United States has also experienced its deadliest wildfire in a century (Maui Fires, 2023), the most expensive wildfire ever recorded (Los Angeles Fires, 2025), and the seventh-largest wildfire in U.S. history (Texas Smokehouse Creek Fire, 2024).¹²

President Trump and Republicans on the House Committee on Natural Resources know what needs to be done to turn the tide of this crisis and restore our forests to a healthy, resilient state. Despite the fear-mongering of increasingly isolated and radical environmentalists, there is a

⁸ National Interagency Fire Center, "Wildfires and Acres," <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Higuera, Philip E., et al., "Shifting social-ecological fire regimes explain increasing structure loss from Western wildfires", *PNAS Nexus*, March 2023, <https://academic.oup.com/pnasnexus/article/2/3/pgad005/7017542>.

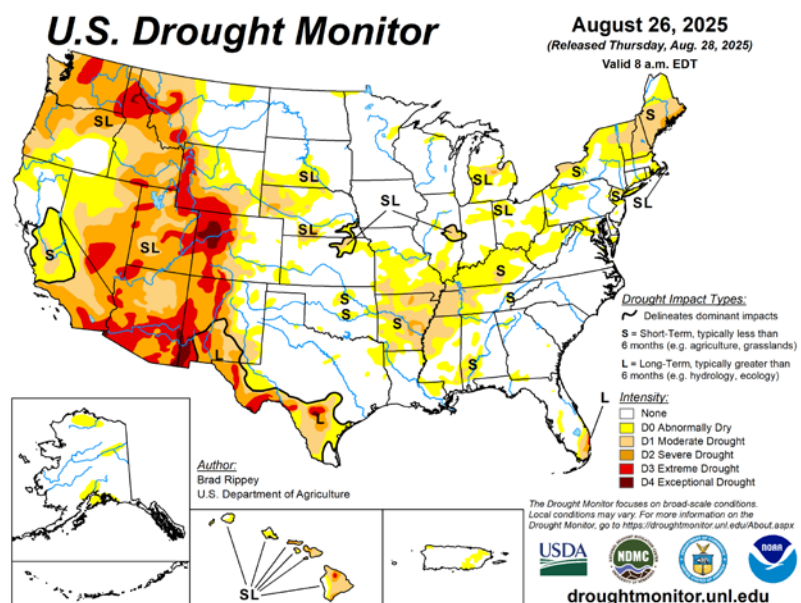
¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Deadliest Wildfire: <https://wfca.com/wildfire-articles/deadliest-wildfires-in-us-history/>; Most expensive wildfire: <https://www.accuweather.com/en/weather-news/accuweather-estimates-more-than-250-billion-in-damages-and-economic-loss-from-la-wildfires/1733821>; Largest wildfire: <https://www.singletonschreiber.com/theblog/the-largest-wildfires-in-u-s-history>.

scientific consensus recognizing the importance of active forest management. Research published last year “found overwhelming evidence” that forest treatments like mechanical thinning and prescribed burning reduce wildfire severity by as much as 72 percent compared to untreated areas.¹³ In areas with no management, such as roadless areas, more acres burned than in non-roadless areas, despite the fact that roadless areas were generally located in areas otherwise less conducive to fire ignitions.¹⁴ Active forest management encourages sustained, healthy growth and removes much of the hazardous fuel buildup that leads to catastrophic wildfires.¹⁵ Managing our forests will also save substantial taxpayer dollars, as recent research suggests that every dollar invested in forest management saves up to seven dollars in suppression costs.¹⁶

The 2025 Fire Year

The 2025 fire year demonstrates the need for a stronger, smarter, and more coordinated approach to active fire suppression.¹⁷ As of September 2, 2025, wildfires burned more than 4.1 million acres this year.¹⁸ The nation is currently at National Preparedness Level 3, which generally means that “[m]obilization of resources nationally is required to sustain incident management operations in active geographic areas.”¹⁹ Models are currently predicting significant wildfire activity concentrated in Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho, and Hawaii and nearly 30 percent of the United States is experiencing drought conditions.²⁰



Drought conditions across the United States.

Source: U.S. Drought Monitor, 2025.

¹³ Davis, et al., “Tamm review: A meta-analysis of thinning, prescribed fire, and wildfire effects on subsequent wildfire severity in conifer dominated forests of the Western US,” *Forest Ecology and Management* Volume 561, 1 June 2024, 121885.

¹⁴ Johnston, James D., et al., “Does conserving roadless wildland increase wildfire activity in western US national forests?,” *Environmental Research Letters*, July 30, 2021, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac13ee/meta>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Strabo, Frederik & Reimer, Matthew, “Before the Burn: The Economic Benefits of Fuel-Reduction Treatments in Wildfire-Prone Forests,” December 19, 2024, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5064565.

¹⁷ National Interagency Fire Center, “Monthly and Seasonal Fire Outlook,” https://www.nifc.gov/nicc-files/predictive/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf.

¹⁸ National Interagency Fire Center, “National Fire News,” <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/nfn>.

¹⁹ National Interagency Fire Center, “Fire Information,” <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information>.

²⁰ NOAA, “National Drought Status” <https://www.drought.gov/national>.

The long-term wildfire threat to communities remains extremely high. 2025 has already produced some of the most destructive wildfires on record, with the Los Angeles Fires in January burning 55,000 acres, destroying 16,251 structures, and claiming 29 lives.²¹ Through fireshed simulation modeling, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) researchers have identified 1,812 communities in the western United States that could be significantly impacted by future wildfires, which would expose an average of roughly 4,000 structures to wildfire per year.²² Sobering fire models have even predicted plausible, extreme-fire scenarios in the near future where almost 500,000 buildings could be lost to wildfire in a single fire season.²³ Other scenarios have identified the probability of wildfires igniting on National Forest System (NFS) lands and burning more than 1.5 million acres in southern California, destroying 100,000 structures and putting thousands of lives at risk.²⁴ Still other independent models have identified 300 communities with fire risk as high as Altadena, California, the city that was affected by the January Eaton Fire that ignited on USFS land.²⁵ These communities collectively contain more than 580,000 structures that could result in estimated insurance losses of \$435 billion, or 1.6 percent of the nation's gross domestic product.²⁶

President Trump's Executive Orders and Supporting Congressional Action



Standing dead timber in a roadless area in the Manti-La Sal National Forest in Utah. **Source:** Redge Johnson, no date.

President Trump has issued two executive orders (EOs) directly related to forest management this year. The first, “Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production” (EO 14225), was issued on March 1, 2025.²⁷ This EO directed USFS to use tools such as Good Neighbor Authority, Stewardship Contracting, and Tribal Forest Protection Act agreements to increase “timber production and sound forest management, reduce time to deliver timber, and decrease timber

²¹ Li, Zhiyun & Yu, William, “Economic Impact of the Los Angeles Wildfires,” UCLA Anderson Forecast, March 3, 2025, <https://www.anderson.ucla.edu/about/centers/ucla-anderson-forecast/economic-impact-los-angeles-wildfires>.

²² Ager, Alan, et al. “Cross-Boundary Wildfire and Community Exposure: A Framework and Application in the Western U.S.,” USDA Forest Service, May 2019.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Barclay, Eliza, “This is a worst-possible wildfire scenario for Southern California,” Vox, <https://www.vox.com/2019/9/10/20804560/climate-change-california-wildfire-2019>.

²⁵ Testimony of Allison Wolff, Vibrant Planet, Federal Lands Subcommittee Hearing on “Fix Our Forests: Advancing Innovative Technologies to Improve Forest Management and Prevent Wildfires,” June 26, 2025, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II10/20250626/118309/HHRG-119-II10-Wstate-WolffA-20250626-U1.pdf>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ “Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production,” Executive Order 14225, March 1, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/03/06/2025-03695/immediate-expansion-of-american-timber-production>.

supply uncertainty.”²⁸ EO 14225 also directed USFS to increase annual timber targets for the next four years, streamline permitting for timber production, and “suspend, revise, or rescind all existing regulations, orders, guidance documents, policies, settlements, consent orders, and other agency actions that impose an undue burden on timber production.”²⁹ In response to this EO, USFS increased its timber targets by 25 percent to achieve at least 4 billion board feet annually by fiscal year (FY) 2028. This target was codified in H.R. 1, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act.”³⁰ Further, on June 23, 2025, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Brooke Rollins announced the rescission of the “Roadless Rule,” which restricted timber harvesting on nearly 59 million acres of USFS land.³¹

On June 12, 2025, President Trump issued a second forestry-related EO entitled “Returning Common Sense to Wildfire Prevention and Response” (Executive Order 14308).³² This EO directs USDA and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to consolidate their wildland fire programs; supports local fire response and the adoption of new technology; and promotes greater use of prescribed fire, fire retardant, and woody biomass.³³ Many of EO 14308’s provisions align with those of H.R. 471, the “Fix Our Forests Act,” sponsored by Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR-04) and Representative Scott Peters (D-CA-50).³⁴ In particular, the Fix Our Forests Act streamlines federal technology procurement (Sec. 102), creates a new pilot program for technology adoption (Sec. 303), studies the consolidation of wildfire responsibilities (Sec. 304), supports innovative wood products (Sec. 301), and reduces wildfire risk from utilities (Sec. 203-04).³⁵ In addition to this legislation, Representative Tom McClintock (R-CA-05) has introduced wildfire suppression legislation, H.R. 178, to address the “slow and inadequate response to wildfires” that “is a direct result of reckless mismanagement and lack of preparedness.”³⁶

FY 2026 Budget Request for Forest Management and Wildland Fire

Budget Overview – The Trump administration’s FY 2026 budget requests a total of \$6.55 billion for wildland fire management, a roughly \$250 million *increase* over FY 2025 enacted budget levels.³⁷ The FY 2026 proposal represents both a strategic restructuring of federal wildfire management and a needed reorientation of the USFS to its core, statutory multiple-use mission. The FY 2026 budget directs USFS to focus on timber production, recreation access, and its

²⁸ 16 U.S.C. 2113a; 16 U.S.C. 6591c; 25 U.S.C. 3115a.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Sec. 80308 of the House-passed OBBBA as engrossed in the House of Representatives; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text>.

³¹ USDA, “Secretary Rollins Rescinds Roadless Rule, Eliminating Impediment to Responsible Forest Management,” June 23, 2025, <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/06/23/secretary-rollins-rescinds-roadless-rule-eliminating-impediment-responsible-forest-management>.

³² “Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response,” Executive Order 14308, June 12, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/06/18/2025-11358/empowering-commonsense-wildfire-prevention-and-response>.

³³ National Interagency Fire Center, Monthly and Seasonal Fire Outlook, https://www.nifc.gov/nicc-files/predictive/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf. The White House, “Fact Sheet : President Donald J. Trump Empowers Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response,” June 12, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/06/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-empowers-commonsense-wildfire-prevention-and-response/>.

³⁴ H.R. 471; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/471>.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Information provided by the Congressional Research Service.

multiple-use mandates across all 193 million acres of the NFS.³⁸ It thoughtfully reprioritizes program funding that does not advance federal forest health or active management toward active fire management regimes. As a result of restricting the budget to increase funding for wildland fire and unify wildland fire responsibilities from USDA to DOI, the budget requests \$2.31 billion in discretionary funding.³⁹

U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) – The FY 2026 budget proposes creating a U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) within DOI to consolidate all federal wildfire responsibilities under a single, unified command.⁴⁰ Currently, federal wildland fire suppression responsibilities “are split across five agencies in two departments.”⁴¹ USWFS would absorb the wildland fire management programs currently split between USFS and DOI and covering more than 693 million acres.⁴² The intent is to “streamline Federal wildfire suppression response, risk mitigation, and coordination with non-Federal partners to address the wildfire crisis.”⁴³ USWFS is intended to centralize functions such as prevention, suppression, hazardous fuels mitigation, dispatch and logistics, training, financial management, and contracting.⁴⁴ Of the \$6.55 billion the administration is proposing for unified wildland fire response, \$3.7 billion would be for USWFS operations and \$2.85 billion would be for a wildfire suppression operations reserve.⁴⁵ The budget also reflects permanent pay increases for all federal and tribal wildland firefighters.⁴⁶ This permanent pay raise was signed into law by President Trump on March 15, 2025.⁴⁷ Every Republican Member of the House Natural Resources Committee voted to support this pay raise; every Democratic Member of the Committee voted no.⁴⁸ These reforms are intended to bring a more agile, military-style coordination to federal fire response, eliminate redundancy, and accelerate hazardous fuels treatment through unified leadership.

Other Legislative Proposals – In addition to creating the USWFS, the USFS FY 2026 budget proposes reauthorizing the Great American Outdoors Act’s (GAOA) Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF), originally signed into law in 2020 by President Trump.⁴⁹ GAOA represented a historic investment in our national parks, national forests, and public lands, aimed at ensuring that these national treasures remain a source of pride and enjoyment for future generations. Reauthorizing the LRF would continue to provide USFS with up to \$285 million annually to address the

³⁸ Hoover, Katie, et al., “Federal Lands and Related Resources: Overview and Selected Issues for the 118th Congress,” Congressional Research Service, February 24, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R43429>.

³⁹ U.S. Forest Service, “FY 2026 Congressional Budget Justification,” page 29a-6, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy26-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

⁴⁰ *Id.* Page 29a-6.

⁴¹ Executive Office of the President, “President Trump’s Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Funding Request Overview,” page 4, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/President-Trump-Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Funding-Request-Overview.pdf>.

⁴² U.S. Department of the Interior, “FY 2026 Budget Justification, U.S. Wildland Fire Service,” page USWFS-2, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/fy26bibuswfs508.pdf>.

⁴³ *Id.* U.S. Wildland Fire Service, page 1.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, FY 2026 Budget in Brief, page DH-11, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/fy26bibdh508.pdf>.

⁴⁷ P.L. 119-4.

⁴⁸ Roll Call 7 | Bill Number: H. R. 23; <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/202570>.

⁴⁹ The White House, “President Trump Signs Great American Outdoors Act, Preserving and Protecting Our National Parks,” <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/articles/president-trump-signs-great-american-outdoors-act-preserving-protecting-national-parks/>.

deferred maintenance backlog across the NFS.⁵⁰ As part of the budget requests, USFS created a list of 68 new projects that it would fund in FY 2026 to enable forest access, support employee housing, and ensure visitor safety.⁵¹ USFS also proposed repurposing \$110.9 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to address the deferred maintenance backlog, rather than funding additional federal land acquisitions.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Id.* Page 29a-122.

⁵¹ *Id.* Page 29a-174.

⁵² *Id.* Pages 29a-195 and 29a-127.