

**PROMOTING FOREST HEALTH AND
RESILIENCY THROUGH IMPROVED ACTIVE
MANAGEMENT**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTRY AND HORTICULTURE
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
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PROMOTING FOREST HEALTH AND RESILIENCY THROUGH IMPROVED ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTRY AND HORTICULTURE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:01 a.m., in Room 1300, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Doug LaMalfa [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives LaMalfa, Moore, Baird, Wied, Thompson (*ex officio*), Salinas, Costa, Riley, and Craig (*ex officio*).

Staff present: John Busovsky, Laurel Lee Chatham, John Hendrix, Sofia Jones, John Konya, Ari Perlmutter, Emma Simon, Michael Stein, and Jackson Blodgett.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DOUG LAMALFA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA

The CHAIRMAN. Welcome. Thank you for joining our hearing today entitled, *Promoting Forest Health and Resiliency Through Improved Active Management*. After brief opening remarks, Members will receive testimony from our witnesses today, and then the hearing will be open to questions.

So, in consultation with the Ranking Member and pursuant to Rule XI(e)(1), I want to make Members of the Subcommittee aware that other Members of the full Committee may join us today.

So, with that, once again, welcome. Today, we will be hearing from a panel of witnesses to discuss the National Forest System, state and private forests, and the many issues before the U.S. Forest Service and the communities located in those forested areas. Today's hearing is also an opportunity to receive feedback on these important issues and recommendations on what Congress could do to encourage more active management of our forests, to restore them, improve forest health, encourage the use of more forest products, and, very importantly, reduce the threat of catastrophic wild-fire in areas that are at the highest risk of these ever-present dangers.

That last part is especially important in the West. We continue to witness devastating wildfires year after year as millions of acres of forestland are burned annually—the loss of forests, homes, property, wildlife, the environmental damage—so much more than we should be enduring, so it, unfortunately, continues to be a chal-

lenge as we constantly face this in the West. The increased severity of the impacts of wildfires is the result of inadequate management and, in some cases, outright mismanagement of our forestlands over decades. In this year alone, more than 47,000 wildfires in the U.S. have burned more than 4 million acres of land. As of yesterday, we have some 66 large fires currently burning in 12 states, including—in the West: Idaho, California, Montana, Washington, Oregon, and several others. Earlier in the year, we saw an unprecedented urban fire situation in southern California, which is, indeed, an unfortunate example of what if we aren't prepared for these threats in all aspects.

What was once a fire season, especially in southern California, seems to be now more of a fire year, a constant year-round effect. Even now, fires rage across the northern and eastern parts of my own district, my colleagues in Oregon, Nevada, as we named them off, burning thousands of acres of land in devastating wildfires that, ultimately, are preventable. It is a crisis. More needs to be done to increase the pace and scale of forest management and reduce the levels of hazardous fuels across our forests. We need every tool in the toolbox. We need to be thinking about partnerships and management on a much larger scale than we have in the recent past.

I appreciate many of the actions taken by this Administration this year to do just that, specifically, the identification of new acreage in need of treatment and plans to ramp up the use of emergency authorities. Those are good starts. Another promising initiative is the effort to increase timber harvest levels above the current targets. For decades, harvesting National Forests has remained far below previous levels and below the amount authorized in current plans. Increasing these goals will help support forest products, rural communities, and overall management of the National Forest System. With all that in mind, Congress still has much more to do to support the agency, the states, counties, Tribes, and other partners to accelerate forest management.

Last year's House farm bill—the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 (H.R. 8467, 118th Congress) provided a variety of new tools and authorities intended to expand partnerships, continue cross-boundary management, improve environmental processes, and help grow new markets for forest products. These are positive reforms that will help land managers restore our forests and protect communities by reducing the threat of wildfire. I support these reforms. I am hopeful this Committee and Congress will soon pass a new farm bill and see these many improvements signed into law.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today, as well as our colleagues on the panel. Your experience and testimony as witnesses are invaluable as this Committee, and as Congress, considers ways to better manage our forests and truly improve wildlife conditions. And with that, I would like to also specifically acknowledge from my home district, Carrie Monohan from Mooretown Rancheria, for traveling all the way from California. I know what that is like. Welcome to all of our witnesses, and we look forward to your testimony and perspectives.

[The prepared statement of Mr. LaMalfa follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DOUG LAMALFA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM CALIFORNIA

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to today's Forestry and Horticulture Subcommittee hearing titled "Promoting Forest Health and Resiliency Through Improved Active Management."

Today we will be hearing from a panel of witnesses to discuss the National Forest System, state and private forests, and the many issues before the U.S. Forest Service and communities located in forested areas.

Today's hearing is also an opportunity to receive feedback on these important issues and recommendations on what Congress can do to encourage more active management of our forests to restore them, improve forest health, encourage the use of more forest products, and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire in areas that are at highest risk of these ever-present disasters.

That last part is especially important. In the West, we continue to witness devastating wildfires year after year as millions of acres of forestland are burned annually. The loss of forests, homes and property, and unfortunately lives continues to be a challenge we constantly face in the West.

The increased severity and impacts of wildfires is the result of inadequate management, and in some cases, outright mismanagement of our forestlands over decades.

In this year alone, more than 47,000 wildfires in the U.S. have burned more than 4 million acres of land. As of yesterday, we have some 66 large fires currently burning in 12 states; including Idaho, California, Montana, Washington, Oregon, and several others.

Earlier in the year, we saw the unprecedented urban fires in southern California, which was an unfortunate example of what can happen if we aren't prepared for these threats. What was once a fire season, is now more of a fire year.

Even now fires rage across the northern and eastern parts of my district, burning thousands of acres of land in devastating wildfires that ultimately are preventable.

This is a crisis and more needs to be done to increase the pace and scale of forest management and reduce the levels of hazardous fuels across our forests.

We need every tool in the toolbox; and we need to be thinking about partnerships and management on a much larger scale than we have in the past.

I appreciate many of the actions that the Trump Administration has taken this year to do just that. Specifically, the identification of new acreage in need of treatment and plans to ramp up the use of emergency authorities are good starts.

Another promising initiative is the effort to increase timber harvest levels above the current targets. For decades, harvesting in the National Forest System has remained far below previous levels, and below the amount authorized in current plans.

Increasing those goals will help support forest products, rural communities, and the overall management of the National Forest System.

With that all in mind, Congress still has much more to do to support the agency, the states, counties, Tribes, and other partners to accelerate forest management.

Last year's House farm bill—the Farm, Food and National Security Act—provided a variety of new tools and authorities intended to expand partnerships, continue cross-boundary management, improve environmental processes, and help grow new markets for forest products.

These are positive reforms that will help land managers restore our forests and protect communities by reducing the threat of wildfire.

I support these reforms and am hopeful this Committee and Congress will soon pass a new farm bill and see these many improvements signed into law.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today. Your experience and testimony are invaluable as this Committee and Congress consider ways to better manage our forests and truly improve wildfire conditions.

I'd also like to specifically acknowledge Dr. Carrie Monohan with the Mooretown Rancheria for traveling all the way from California to be here today.

Welcome to all of our witnesses, and we look forward to your testimony and perspectives.

With that, I will yield to Ranking Member Salinas for any opening remarks she would like to provide.

The CHAIRMAN. I will now yield to our Ranking Member Salinas for any her opening remarks.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ANDREA SALINAS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM OREGON**

Ms. SALINAS. Well, thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, for convening us today, and thank you to our witnesses for being here and making the trek out. And I especially want to thank Dean DeLuca, who has consistently provided my team and me with valuable input that informs our work here in Washington. I know that Dean's testimony and answers today, along with the perspectives of our other distinguished witnesses, will give this Subcommittee important insights as we consider the future of active forest management across the country.

I want to be clear at the outset of this hearing, active, science-based management is not about clear-cutting large swaths of forests. It is about targeted thinning, prescribed fire, fuels reduction, and other practices that restore balance to ecosystems and reduce wildfire risks to our communities. We can prevent and combat catastrophic wildfires without irreparably harming and damaging the habitat and ecosystems we require to survive as humans. Unfortunately, even as the need for active management has grown more urgent, recent actions by the Trump Administration have undermined the Forest Service's ability to actually meet that challenge. The Department of Agriculture's proposed reorganization, which would centralize staff and research in distant hubs, threatens to strip away local expertise and the trusted partnerships that are essential for success. That includes longstanding collaborations with institutions like the Oregon State University. Workforce reductions have only worsened the problem. As many as 5,000 Forest Service employees have been lost this year when the agency already isn't meeting its needed staffing requirements. These personnel cuts have primarily impacted staff who were relatively new to their roles, as well as the agency's most experienced staff nearing the end of their careers. The result is critical gaps in knowledge, research, and local capacity at the very moment when we should be scaling up all of these efforts.

On top of these workforce challenges, the Trump Administration's budget proposes deep reductions to the very programs that help state, Tribal, and private partners carry out active management. These are the programs that fund cooperative agreements, technical assistance, and cross-boundary projects. Cutting them undermines the ability of states and Tribes to match Federal efforts on the ground, weakening the partnerships we know are essential for forest health.

That leads me to a larger point. The success of active forest management depends on partnerships. Tribes, states and local governments, universities, and private landowners all bring unique tools and expertise to this work. Programs like Good Neighbor Authority, Service First agreements, and shared stewardship show what is possible when we work together. In Oregon, we have seen first-hand how impactful these partnerships can be, and institutions like Oregon State have proven how seamlessly they can work with their Federal partners. But instead of strengthening these partnerships, the Trump Administration has pursued theatrical actions that will undermine our ability to meaningfully improve the health and resilience of our forests.

One example is Secretary Rollins' repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule, which she justified as a way to expand active management and reduce wildfire risk. The truth is that roadless areas are remote and costly to access. They are not landscapes where decades of logging and deferred management have led to overstock and increased fire risk. They are not where wildfire poses the greatest threat to communities, people, and property. In fact, research shows that fire risk only increases in areas with roads and human activities. Our priority must be to focus on active management where the risk is highest, not to rescind protections in hopes of opening up new areas for industrial access.

The Subcommittee has a responsibility to ensure that the Forest Service has the resources, workforce, and research capacity it needs to carry out its mission and ensure the health and resilience of our nation's forestlands. We must advance policies in the upcoming farm bill and beyond that expand science-informed management, strengthen partnerships, and keep our focus squarely on protecting people, communities, and ecosystems at risk. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and working together to chart a path forward that will help us achieve these goals.

Thank you so much, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Salinas follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ANDREA SALINAS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM OREGON

Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, for convening us today, and thank you to our witnesses for making the trip.

I especially want to thank Dean DeLuca, who has consistently provided my team and me with valuable input that informs our work here in Washington. I know the Dean's testimony and answers today, along with the perspectives of our other distinguished witnesses, will give this Subcommittee important insights as we consider the future of active forest management in this country.

I want to be clear at the outset of this hearing—active, science-based management is not about clear-cutting large swaths of forest. It is about targeted thinning, prescribed fire, fuels reduction, and other practices that restore balance to ecosystems and reduce wildfire risks to communities. We can prevent and combat catastrophic wildfires without irreparably damaging the habitat and ecosystems we require to survive as humans.

Unfortunately, even as the need for active management has grown more urgent, recent actions by the Trump Administration have undermined the Forest Service's ability to meet that challenge.

The Department of Agriculture's proposed reorganization, which would centralize staff and research in distant hubs, threatens to strip away local expertise and trusted partnerships that are essential for success. That includes long-standing collaborations with institutions like Oregon State University.

Workforce reductions have only worsened the problem. As many as 5,000 Forest Service employees have been lost this year, when the agency already isn't meeting its needed staffing requirements. These personnel cuts have primarily impacted staff who were relatively new to their roles, as well as the agency's most experienced staff nearing the end of their careers. The result is critical gaps in knowledge, research, and local capacity at the very moment when we should be scaling up our efforts.

On top of these workforce challenges, the Trump Administration's budget proposes deep reductions to the very programs that help state, Tribal, and private partners carry out active management. These are the programs that fund cooperative agreements, technical assistance, and cross-boundary projects. Cutting them undermines the ability of states and Tribes to match Federal efforts on the ground, weakening the partnerships we know are essential for forest health.

That leads me to a larger point—the success of active forest management depends on partnerships. Tribes, states, local governments, universities, and private landowners all bring unique tools and expertise. Programs like Good Neighbor Author-

ity, Service First agreements, and shared stewardship show what's possible when we work together. In Oregon, we have seen firsthand how impactful these partnerships can be, and institutions like Oregon State have proven how seamlessly they can work with their Federal partners.

But, instead of strengthening these partnerships, the Trump Administration has pursued theatrical actions that will undermine our ability to meaningfully improve the health and resilience of our forests.

One example is Secretary Rollins's repeal of the 2001 Roadless Rule, which she has justified as a way to expand active management and reduce wildfire risk.

The truth is that roadless areas are remote and costly to access. They are not the landscapes where decades of logging and deferred management have led to overstock and increased fire risk. They are not where wildfire poses the greatest threat to communities, people, and property. In fact, research shows that fire risk only increases in areas with roads and human activities. Our priority must be to focus on active management where the risk is highest, not to rescind protections in hopes of opening new areas for industrial access.

This Subcommittee has a responsibility to ensure the Forest Service has the resources, workforce, and research capacity it needs to carry out its mission and ensure the health and resilience of our nation's forestlands. We must advance policies in the upcoming farm bill and beyond that expand science-informed management, strengthen partnerships, and keep our focus squarely on protecting people, communities, and ecosystems at risk.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and working together to chart a path forward that will help us achieve these goals.

Thank you, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Salinas. We will recognize our Chairman of our Agriculture Committee, Mr. Thompson, for his comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. THOMPSON. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, and thanks to our witnesses for being here today. Chairman and Ranking Member, great job with the folks you have brought to the table for this hearing. I am excited to read their testimony. I am excited to hear from them. Coming to Washington is never easy, but it is so important for you to be here and to share your perspectives today, to bring your expertise.

For decades, our nation's forests have seen a decline in forest health due to a lack of management, invasive species outbreaks, overgrowth, and other factors. I have been proud of the work this Committee has done over the past several farm bill cycles to provide the Forest Service with a number of tools and authorities intending to encourage more active management, more partnerships, and the use of forest products, expanding the markets. For example, this includes the authorization of the Good Neighbor, authorities for cross-boundary projects, and expanded categorical exclusions such as insect and disease CEs, just to name a few. These are commonsense reforms that will help encourage more landscape-scaled management of the National Forest System and adjacent forestlands.

Now, given the scale of the restoration and the fuels reduction needed on millions of acres, we must be thinking about management on a much larger landscape scale. Now, while I remain encouraged by many of the President's Executive Orders and management actions proposed by the Forest Service, particularly the efforts to increase harvest above the current targets, this Committee must also do its part to support the agency to help get more work on the ground as quickly and as effectively as possible. Last year,

this Committee favorably reported the Farm, Food, and National Security Act to deliver a new farm bill for rural America. Title VIII, the forestry title, expanded on the good work that this Committee has done in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills in a variety of ways to encourage more management, more market opportunities for forest products, and commonsense improvements to environmental processes and Forest Service administration. We are now 2 years past the original expiration of the 2018 Farm Bill, and the time to act on a new law is now.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how we can encourage and improve forest health and resiliency and what this Committee should also be thinking about to further support forest managers and rural communities. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thompson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today. Coming to Washington is never easy but it is so important for you to be here and share your perspectives today.

For decades, our nation's forests have seen a decline in forest health due to a lack of management, invasive species outbreaks, overgrowth, and other factors.

I have been proud of the work this Committee has done over the past several farm bill cycles to provide the Forest Service with a number of new tools and authorities intending to encourage more active management, more partnerships, and the use of forest products.

For example, this includes the authorization of Good Neighbor, authorities for cross-boundary projects, and expanded categorical exclusions such as the insect and disease CE, just to name a few.

These are commonsense reforms that will help encourage more landscape-scale management of the National Forest System and adjacent forestlands. Given the scale of the restoration and fuels reduction needed on millions of acres, we must be thinking about management on a much larger landscape scale.

While I remain encouraged by many of the President's Executive Orders and management actions proposed by the Forest Service, particularly the efforts to increase harvest above the current targets, this Committee must also do its part to support the agency to help get this more work on the ground as quickly and effectively as possible.

Last year, this Committee favorably reported the Farm, Food, and National Security Act to deliver a new farm bill for rural America.

Title VIII expanded on the good work this Committee has done in prior farm bills in a variety of ways to encourage more management, more market opportunities for forest products, and commonsense improvements to environmental processes and Forest Service administration.

We're now 2 years past the original expiration of the 2018 Farm Bill and the time to act on a new law is now.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how we can encourage improved forest health and resiliency, and what this Committee should also be thinking about to further support forest managers and rural communities.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will recognize our Ranking Member, Angie Craig, for any comments she would have to make.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ANGIE CRAIG, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA**

Ms. CRAIG. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to my colleagues for organizing this hearing, and especially to our

witnesses for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today.

I am pleased to see the Committee engage more on forestry issues and, specifically, the current conversation about the future of the U.S. Forest Service. I cannot overstate my concern over the hollowing out of the Forest Service in recent months. We have lost countless dedicated public servants, many of whom held wildfire certifications, served on the line during fire season, and played essential support roles for the agency's core functions. In total, the agency has lost more than 5,000 employees, amounting to nearly 15 percent of the total workforce. I hope our witnesses will speak to the effect this downsizing is having or may have on the Forest Service's ability to fulfill its critical mission.

Many of this Administration's policies regarding the Forest Service are deeply concerning. They have recklessly proposed slashing Federal funding for state, Tribal, and private forestry programs that provide critical technical and financial assistance to forest landowners and land managers helping to conserve our nation's forests and protect vulnerable communities from wildfire. I know we have witnesses here today that can share with us the importance of these farm bill-authorized programs. The President's budget also included the total elimination of funding for all but one of the Forest Service's research and development programs. The world-class scientists at Forest Service research stations throughout the country work every day to develop early warning technology that keeps our communities and firefighters on the frontlines safe. They analyze data to identify where we are most vulnerable to fire, landslides, or insect and disease outbreaks, and test responses so that we can protect our communities with evidence-based management practices. My colleagues on this Subcommittee cannot ignore the risk this Administration is taking here in managing these critical issues.

Proposals to move wildfire activity out of the Forest Service, especially during an active fire season, are ill informed and threaten the agency's comprehensive approach to forest management. Additionally, the Administration's announcement to rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule puts our forests at greater risk of wildfire, watershed degradation, and wildlife habitat loss. There are more high-priority acres that need management to reduce these risks than we currently have capacity to treat. We should target these rather than reopening a decades-old political fight that is sure to result in litigation. I share this Administration's goal to increase active management on Federal lands, and I agree that more board-feet need to come off our National Forests to reduce the risk of megafires, which has the added benefit of supporting the wood products industry. But, do we even have the staff capacity to accomplish our timber goals? And if we eliminate Forest Service R&D, will the wood products industry end up suffering more than it benefits from changes to Federal policy? More recently, the USDA's half-baked reorganization plan promises to consolidate forestry research scientists and jeopardizes the work they are doing with universities and other partners throughout the country.

Simply put, all these decisions undermine the Forest Service's statutory requirement to manage our nation's forests to meet the

needs of present and future generations. A 5 year farm bill represents a serious opportunity in front of this Committee to not only address the commonsense issues that everyone agrees need to be made, but also the challenges and concerns which undermine the Forest Service's mission and threaten forests across the country. Only if a farm bill process is truly and meaningfully bipartisan and devoid of poison pills will we be able to provide stability to the Forest Service, clarify Congressional intent on the agency's operations, and challenge some of the Administration's most ill-informed and rash decisions. I look forward to working with my colleagues, our witnesses, and the broader forestry community on the way forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Craig follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. ANGIE CRAIG, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM MINNESOTA

Thank you to my colleagues for organizing this hearing and to our witnesses for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today. I am pleased to see this Committee engage more on forestry issues, and specifically the current conversation about the future of the U.S. Forest Service.

I cannot overstate my concern over the hollowing out of the Forest Service in recent months. We have lost countless dedicated public servants, many of whom held wildfire certifications, served on the line during fire season and played essential support roles for the agency's core functions. In total, the agency has lost more than 5,000 employees, amounting to nearly 15 percent of the total workforce. I hope our witnesses will speak to the effect this downsizing is having or may have on the Forest Service's ability to fulfill its critical mission.

Many of this Administration's policies regarding the Forest Service are deeply concerning. They have recklessly proposed slashing Federal funding for state, Tribal and private forestry programs that provide critical technical and financial assistance to forest landowners and land managers helping to conserve our nation's forests and protect vulnerable communities from wildfire. I know we have witnesses here today that can share with us the importance of these farm bill-authorized programs.

The President's budget request also included the total elimination of funding for all but one of the Forest Service's research and development programs. The world class scientists at Forest Service research stations throughout this country work every day to develop early warning technology that keeps our communities and firefighters on the front line safe. They analyze data to identify where we are most vulnerable to fire, landslides or insect and disease outbreaks and test responses so that we can protect our communities with evidence-based management practices. My Republican colleagues on this Subcommittee cannot ignore the risks this Administration is taking here in managing these critical issues.

Proposals to move wildfire activity out of the Forest Service, especially during an active fire season, are ill-informed and threaten the agency's comprehensive approach to forest management.

Additionally, the Administration's announcement to rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule puts our forests at greater risk of wildfire, watershed degradation and wildlife habitat loss. There are more high-priority acres that need management to reduce these risks than we currently have capacity to treat. We should target these rather than reopening a decades old political fight that is sure to result in litigation. I share this Administration's goal to increase active management on Federal lands. And I agree that more board-feet need to come off our National Forests to reduce the risk of mega-fires, which has the added benefit of supporting the wood products industry. But do we even have the staff capacity to accomplish our timber goals? And if we eliminate Forest Service R&D, will the wood products industry end up suffering more than it benefits from changes to Federal policy?

Most recently, the USDA's half-baked reorganization plan promises to consolidate forestry research scientists and jeopardizes the work they're doing with universities and other partners throughout the country. Simply put, all these decisions undermine the Forest Service's statutory requirement to manage our nation's forests to meet the needs of present and future generations.

A 5 year farm bill represents a serious opportunity in front of this Committee to not only address the common-sense issues that everyone agrees need to be made,

but also the challenges and concerns which undermine the Forest Service's mission and threaten forests across the country. Only if a farm bill process is truly and meaningfully bipartisan and devoid of poison pills will we be able to provide stability to the Forest Service, clarify Congressional intent on the agency's operations and challenge some of the Administration's most rash decisions. I look forward to working with my colleagues, our witnesses and the broader forestry community on the way forward.

Thank you and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Craig. Normally, this would be the time I would have the witnesses give their testimony, but we have multiple committees today, so I would like to have the opportunity for our Members here to be able to get their work in here before they would have to go. So, I am going to recognize Mr. Moore for 5 minutes with a statement and questions of the panel, so, panel, be ready, and we will get to your comments in a moment here. Thank you.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I recently sat down for a conversation about the future of space mining and how we might one day source minerals and metals from beyond Earth to fuel innovation here at home, but there is one resource the scientists have yet to find in space, and that is wood. The Lord put our forests right here on Earth, and they remain one of the most renewable, reliable resources we have been blessed with, all while supporting jobs, communities, and industries across Alabama and our entire nation. Mr. Dane, your testimony described the Fix Our Forests Act (H.R. 471) as comprehensive forest management. In your view, what are the most important forest management reforms provided by that legislation or the Farm, Food, and National Security Act?

Mr. DANE. Mr. Chairman, Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about that. The Fix Our Forests Act, first of all, is a forest management and a wildfire mitigation piece of legislation. The American—the logging industry are just merely tools to help accomplish those objectives in the Fix Our Forests Act. Now, there are quite a few things that are included in the Fix Our Forests Act. One of them—I know this somewhat controversial—is litigation reform, but there is no denying the fact that litigation has dragged out billions of board-feet of timber management for protracted periods of time and resulted in many lost opportunities, so litigation reform is important.

Let me see here. The Fix Our Forests Act, obviously they are looking at increasing the scope and scale—or pace and scale of forest management, and that is extremely critical as well. The western states, particularly, that are dependent upon Federal timber, have been choked out in many instances, to the point where the supply was not there to support the mills remaining viable. In California alone, there were 150 mills 20, 25 years ago. They are down to 27 mills there. So, increasing the available timber supply is vital to supporting the infrastructure that is necessary for forest management. As an example, if there is no market, there is no management.

Mr. MOORE. So, the litigation itself is slowing the process of getting the timber to the mills. Is that kind of what I am understanding, Mr. Dane? Is that part of it?

Mr. DANE. Yes.

Mr. MOORE. What else is causing issues?

Mr. DANE. That is part of it. I mean, it drags it out for multiple years. And as an example, fire salvage timber that is put up for sale can be dragged out 6 years before it can actually go to market. Eighteen months after the fire goes through, the value of the timber is useless except for anything more than biomass, so if we could salvage that within that 18 month period, we could add value to it and utilize that timber. That is an example.

Mr. MOORE. Gotcha. Mr. Dane, retaining saw mills, obviously, and increase in forest product infrastructure continues to be a challenge in many areas. Given that the industry is a key partner in managing forests, do you think there are ways that we can help sustain and support new processing and infrastructure? I think the lawsuits are part of that, but what else do you think we might could do from Congress' standpoint to help?

Mr. DANE. Well, I think that a major step with this Administration has occurred with the trade investigations and the imports. As an example, the United States' sawmills are operating at 72 percent capacity right now, and they can obviously go up to 85+ percent capacity. We are the largest importer of softwood lumber in the world right now. We can produce more domestically. And as another example, Brazil is exporting plywood to the United States while the United States is closing plywood mills. So, trade is a very big factor regarding increasing market share and supporting the current infrastructure.

Mr. MOORE. All right. Ms. Barnes, one last question. I have about 45 seconds. We know coordination between state, local, and Federal land managers and fire responders is an ongoing workload. Can you tell us more about how this coordination occurs before, during, and after a fire, and are there specific barriers that hinder the cooperation?

Ms. BARNES. Yes. Thank you for the question. Interagency coordination is key, especially in the State of Utah. State, local, and Federal partners work together in a seamless space of how to respond to wildfires and how to do forest management. There are things that can hinder that at times based on resource capacity, based on jurisdictional boundaries, but in Utah, we are pretty good at responding to fires and working in a seamless capacity. I like to tell people that wildfire is one thing that we can't do alone. It takes all of us to do it, so bringing in that interagency coordination from a local level and to a state level and also a Federal level is something that is very important, and it is something that we have to continue to do.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Moore. Good luck in the markup.

All right. Now, we will go back to the regularly-scheduled programming here, so, again, panelists, thank you for joining us. You know the rules. Each of you will have 5 minutes, and so just watch the timer and watch the colors on the stoplight, and you will know what to do.

So, let me first introduce Ms. Jamie Barnes, the Utah State Forester in the Division of Forestry Fire and State Lands of the Utah Department of Natural Resources. So, take it away, 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF JAMIE BARNES, DIRECTOR/STATE FORESTER,
UTAH DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, DIVISION OF
FORESTRY, FIRE AND STATE LANDS, SALT LAKE CITY, UT;
ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE
FORESTERS**

Ms. BARNES. Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, and Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee, for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify before you on behalf of the National Association of State Foresters. My name is Jamie Barnes. I am the State Forester and Director of the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands in Utah. In my role, I am responsible for overseeing forest health, and responding to wildfires and managing sovereign lands in Utah. Established in 1920, the National Association of State Foresters is composed of the directors of forestry agencies in 50 states, D.C., and all the U.S. Territories, and nations in compacts of free association.

State Foresters have been tasked with implementing National Forest policy priorities for over a century, providing technical assistance to landowners, and managing 76 million acres of state-owned forested land that supply critical timber. State Foresters also work cooperatively to improve the resilience and productivity of Federal lands. State Foresters work to advance resilient landscapes and provide effective wildfire response across 1.5 billion acres. NASF, the only non-Federal entity on the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group, is a critical part of the national inter-agency fire coordination that provides response on Federal lands and manages the nation's largest, most complex fires. State forestry agencies and local departments respond to 80 percent of the fires nationwide.

Under the first Trump Administration, State Foresters formalized their commitments to greater partnerships through shared stewardship with the Forest Service and other agencies. Utah is on our second shared stewardship agreement, the first being signed in 2019 and the second in 2022. Utah has had great success bringing partners together and stakeholders together to focus on the right work in the right place at the right scale. A total of \$30 million has been invested in active forest management actions, which include work in critical watersheds that are high risk for wildfires. With President Trump's recent Executive Orders, there has been a renewed emphasis on the role of states in assisting with pressing challenges facing our forests. Utah has taken a proactive approach with the Forest Service, engaging in conversations around a shared stewardship agreement or other supported model where we partner together in land management. Utah values the partnerships we have built in the state, and we support carrying out critical management objectives together to meet increased acreage targets, production goals, the ability to better serve our industry partners and reduce wildfire risk in our rural communities, revitalizing these communities for our future generations.

Good Neighbor Authority has been a critical tool for states to increase the pace and scale of cooperative Federal land management while providing economic opportunities for rural communities. Through GNA, western states have completed over 66,000 acres of fuels and forest health projects, 291 timber sales across 98,000

acres of Federal lands, and generating over 840 million of board-feet of timber. However, the ability for GNA to meet current national needs is dependent on four levers: sustaining the state and private forestry programs, integrating state-Federal project planning, dedicated and predictable funding for the GNA projects, and state discretion and operational autonomy under GNA.

State staff with GNA responsibilities are frequently supported by a broad range of Federal funding. On average, state forestry agencies would lose 20 percent of their workforce capacity if Forest Service and private and state forestry programs were defunded. In addition, predictable and increased funding for GNA projects cannot be understated because not all states have Forest Service lands that have robust timber markets or marketable timber. Forested lands in Utah are one of the state's most valuable natural resources. They provide scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, clean air, and supply timber products. Most of the forested lands in each of the states are held by private landowners or by the Forest Service. In Utah, the Division 6 area offices employs a forester who works with landowners to provide assistance to those wishing to utilize or improve their forested lands. This is made possible through Congressional authorities and funding. It plays an important role in the work we do in Utah and creates direct results on the ground that are cross-boundary, benefiting communities and future generations to come.

NASF is grateful for the Committee's work this last year on the farm bill to capture State Foresters' priorities, sustain the active management for private forested lands, including authorizing assistance for the State Action Plan, strengthening our national reforestation capacity by codifying the RNGR, and NASF looks forward to working with the Committee to address additional amendments to the Conservation Reserve Program and the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program. Thank you again for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Barnes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMIE BARNES, DIRECTOR/STATE FORESTER, UTAH DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, DIVISION OF FORESTRY, FIRE AND STATE LANDS, SALT LAKE CITY, UT; ON BEHALF OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is pleased to provide written testimony to the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture for this important hearing on *Promoting Forest Health and Resiliency Through Improved Active Management*. Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of NASF.

Established in 1920, the National Association of State Foresters is a nonprofit organization composed of the directors of forestry agencies in the 50 states, five U.S. territories, three nations in compacts of free association with the U.S., and the District of Columbia. State Forestry Agencies have been tasked with implementing National Forest policy priorities for over a century, underpinned by direction and authorities provided by the House and Senate Agriculture Committee to achieve the necessary scale and coordination that is otherwise out of reach. Since the 2008 Farm Bill, this role has been supported by State Forest Action Plans, guiding State Forestry Agencies in active management and protection of state and private forests, which encompass nearly 2/3 of all forests nationwide. State Foresters provide technical assistance to private landowners and directly manage 76 million acres of state-owned forestland that supply critical timber for domestic uses. In addition, State Foresters and their agencies work to improve the health, resilience, and productivity of Federal lands through partnerships such as Shared Stewardship Agreements and

farm bill authorities such as Good Neighbor Authority and cross-boundary hazardous fuel reduction projects.

In collaboration with local governments and Federal agencies, State Foresters also work to advance resilient landscapes and fire-adapted communities and provide safe, effective wildfire response on 1.5 billion acres, a large portion of which is in the wildland-urban interface. NASF—the only non-Federal partner serving on the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group at the National Interagency Fire Center—is a critical part of the national interagency coordination that provides response on Federal lands and manages the nation's largest, most complex fires. Collectively, State Forestry Agencies and local fire departments respond to 80 percent of fires nationwide and in 2024 over a third of state and local dispatches through the National Interagency Fire Center were deployed to battle fires on Federal lands.

As State Forester and Director of the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands, my agency is responsible for forest health, responding to wildland fires and managing sovereign lands in Utah. In Utah the approach to fighting wildfire is an interagency model through coordinated efforts with state, Federal and local partners. This collaborative framework, referred to as the Cooperative Wildfire System, helps fund large fires throughout the state but also focuses on prevention, preparedness and mitigation efforts in exchange for that ability to delegate.

Meaningful, landscape-scale active forest management is spurred and strengthened by Federal investment provided through the farm bill and conveyed through the USDA Forest Service's State, Private, and Tribal Forestry mission area, with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency also playing significant partnership roles. We thank the Committee for their work in the *Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024* to capture a number of State Forester priorities to bring these tools and resources to bear and offer the following perspectives and priorities as the Committee works towards a 2025 Farm Bill.

Cooperative Federal Land Management through State Forestry Agencies

State Forestry Agencies provide boots-on-the-ground capacity to get the work done quickly and effectively by leveraging a wide range of investments made through the Forest Service and other Federal partners. Thanks to the support under the first Trump Administration, over 30 states took the initiative to formalize their commitments to greater partnership and collaboration through Shared Stewardship Agreements with the Forest Service and other agencies. State Forestry Agencies have played a vital role in ensuring the success of the collaborative shared stewardship framework by coordinating key partners and facilitating active management across all ownerships including Federal lands.

Utah is on our second Shared Stewardship agreement, the first being signed in 2019 and the second in 2022. Utah has had great success in this area bringing partners and stakeholders to focus on the right work, in the right place at the right scale. A total of \$30 million has been invested in this program in active forest management actions which include work in critical watersheds that are at high risk for wildfires.

With the President's March 2025 Executive Order 14225 *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production and the Forest Service National Active Management Strategy*, there has been renewed emphasis on the role of states in assisting with addressing the pressing challenges facing our Federal forests, namely reducing catastrophic wildfire risk and revitalizing rural economies. NASF supports the Trump Administration's bold and proactive approach to forest management and affirms our continued commitment to partnering across jurisdictions. Through Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and other authorities, State Forestry Agencies are able to support the Forest Service in carrying out critical active management treatments to meet domestic timber production goals, support industry partners, and reduce wildfire risk across forested landscapes.

Utah has taken a proactive approach with the Forest Service engaging in conversations around a renewed Shared Stewardship agreement or other supported model where we partner together in land management. Utah values the partnerships we have built in the state and we support carrying out critical management objectives together to meet increased acreage targets, production goals, the ability to better serve our industry partners and reduce the wildfire risk in our rural communities revitalizing these communities for our future generations.

GNA has been proven time and again as an effective tool for states and the Forest Service to increase the pace and scale of improvements to forests and watersheds, reducing wildfire risks, supporting cross-boundary projects and coordination, and providing job opportunities for rural communities. GNA has been utilized by over $\frac{2}{3}$ of the nation's State Forestry Agencies since its enactment in the 2014 Farm Bill. In this time, 13 state forestry agencies in the western United States have reported

a cumulative 170 agreements with the Forest Service, completing over 66,000 acres of fuels and forest health projects and 291 timber sales across almost 98,000 acres. These timber sales have generated over 840 million board-feet of timber and a combined net value in excess of \$80 million.

However, the ability for GNA meet the current needs on Federal lands is dependent on four critical levers: sustained funding for the Forest Service's State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs, integrated state and Federal planning for activities, treatments, and long-term goals, dedicated and predictable funding for state GNA projects, and state discretion and operational autonomy under GNA to act effectively on needed active forest management activities. State staff with GNA responsibilities are frequently supported by a broad range of Federal funding including state, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs, and a recent survey of NASF membership indicated that on average State Forestry Agencies would lose 20 percent of their work-force capacity if the programs were defunded, with individual agency losses as high as 80 percent.

Additionally, the role of dedicated and predictable funding for State Forestry Agencies to perform GNA cannot be understated, especially as not all states and National Forest System lands have robust timber markets and/or marketable timber that can sustain a state GNA program. Given the Forest Service's request for states to contribute to Congress and the Administration's goal of increasing timber harvest and mitigating wildfire risk, additional Federal funds will be required to bolster state GNA programs and projects. As further strides are made between State Forestry Agencies and the Forest Service on new Shared Stewardship Agreements and an increased utilization of GNA—including the final implementation of the flexibilities provided by the EXPLORE Act—we look forward to working with the Committee on any statutory amendments for the 2025 Farm Bill to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing authorities.

In addition to GNA, NASF acknowledges and thanks the Committee for a number of reauthorizations and expansions of cross-boundary and Federal forest management authorities in the *Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024*, including:

- *Reauthorization of Cross-boundary Hazardous Fuel Reduction Projects (Section 8202)*—The threat posed by wildland fire requires a comprehensive all-lands approach to proactive forest management and prevent the spread of wildfire between jurisdictions. First championed by then-Senator Ted Stevens in Fiscal Year 2002, cross-boundary hazardous fuels reduction funding is allocated by Congressional direction to facilitate coordinated fuels reduction on private lands in proximity to National Forest System lands. This critical funding has provided flexibility for the Forest Service to use the money where it provides the most benefit for community protection. With inconsistent national distribution of this capacity under the Fiscal Year 2025 Continuing Resolution, we look forward to working with the Committee to reauthorize this authority in the 2025 Farm Bill.
- *Amending the Definition of At-Risk Community (Section 8201)*—The Healthy Forest Restoration Act contains a problematic definition for “at-risk community” which is restricted to wildland urban interface communities only within the vicinity of Federal lands. This language has long been viewed as a problem by NASF because it excludes communities that have been identified as “at-risk” by state wildfire risk assessments and other collaboratively developed tools used by Federal and state agencies, such as the Pacific Northwest Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment and the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal.
- *National Forest System Management Authorities (Sections 8402, 8403, 8404, and 8411)*—NASF is grateful for the Committee's inclusion of the “Cottonwood Fix”—clarifying the criteria under which Federal land managers are not required to re-initiate Endangered Species Act consultation—and the reauthorization and expansion of categorical exclusions for wildfire resilience projects, fuel breaks, and insect and disease projects. These provisions can meaningfully increase the pace and scale of cross-boundary forest management and wildfire mitigation work.
- *Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Program (Section 8420)*—NASF appreciates the Committee extending the authorization for the Joint Chiefs' Program which—through bringing to bear resources and expertise of the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service—has improved the health and resilience of forest landscapes across National Forest System lands and state, Tribal, and private land.

Sustaining Active Management of State and Private Forests through the Farm Bill

Since the turn of the 20th century, Congress has recognized and reinforced the need for partnership between the Federal Government and states for the benefit of actively managing all of America's forests—private, state, and Federal. Only a few years after the Forest Service was created, Congress created the nexus between the Forest Service and State Forestry Agencies with the Weeks Act of 1911 and the Clarke-McNary Act of 1924, authorizing technical and financial assistance to states for wildfire control and post-fire reforestation. Subsequent legislative milestones in the form of the Cooperative Forest Management Act of 1950, the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, the 1990 Farm Bill, and every farm bill since have further provided Congressional direction and authorities to the Forest Service and its role as a key partner to State Forestry Agencies in the active management of state and private forestlands.

Forested lands in Utah are one of the state's most valuable natural resources. They provide scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, clean air and supply timber products. Most of the forested lands in the state are held by private landowners or by the Forest Service. Each of the Division's 6 area offices employs a forester who works with landowners and to provide assistance to those wishing to utilize, improve or conserve their forested lands, this includes reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. This is made possible through Congressional direction, authorities and funding. It plays an important role in the work we do in Utah and creates direct results on the ground cross-boundary benefiting communities and future generations to come.

NASF is grateful for the Committee's work in the *Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024* to capture a number of State Foresters' key national priorities to sustain the active management of state and private forestlands—or ⅔ of all forests nationwide—including:

- *State Forest Action Plan Implementation Capacity (Section 8101)*—Mandated by the 2008 Farm Bill, State Forest Action Plans offer practical and comprehensive roadmaps for investing Federal, state, local, and private resources where they can be most effective in achieving national conservation goals. Collectively, State Forest Action Plans make up one strategic plan for America's forests. States have consistently advocated for funding flexibility—that is the ability for each state to receive funds that allow for the use of all the authorities of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act. By eliminating the color of money associated with several different Federal programs, State Forestry Agencies will be able to more effectively utilize the resources needed to implement the forest management goals of their individual State Forest Action Plans, while bringing state, nonprofit, and philanthropic support that states are uniquely able to unlock.
- *Supporting Reforestation through the Forest Service's Reforestation, Nurseries and Genetic Resources (RNCR) Program (Section 8305)*—First created in 2001, the Forest Service's RNCR Program provides assistance to states, Tribes and other partners in native plant seed and seedling production, focusing on adequate supplies of seedlings for conservation and reforestation, propagation and planting methods, cost-effective production and planting techniques, and—ultimately—tree planting to address forest resilience, land reclamation, and land rehabilitation after extreme fire events or other natural disasters impacting forests. However, because the program has been governed through Memorandums of Understanding between agency deputy areas rather than as a standalone program, the significant national reforestation demands on Federal, state, and private lands, and an estimated \$160 million in unmet infrastructure needs at state and Tribal nurseries that serve all landownerships, codifying and resourcing the RNCR Program is critical. We greatly appreciate the Committee's work on including this provision and ask for the addition of a critical pay-for mechanism—identified funding from the Forest Service's Reforestation Trust Fund—that is important for ensuring the permanent nursery infrastructure program does not redirect funds from other programs necessary for executing national forestry priorities.
- *Bolstering the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (Section 8708)*—The Emergency Forest Restoration Program—administered by the Farm Service Agency with technical expertise from the Forest Service—was codified in the 2008 Farm Bill and has proven to be woefully inadequate and too cumbersome for most landowners to benefit from. NASF applauds the work of the Committee to allow for impacted private forest landowners to receive 75 percent of cost of payment up front, as opposed to a program design based on reimbursement. Timely and ecologically proper timber salvage and reforestation helps ensure

our nation's private forestlands continue to provide public benefits like clean air and water, recreational opportunities, rural economic stimulus and more.

NASF also looks forward to working with the Committee to address two further priorities as it considers a 2025 Farm Bill:

- *Utilizing the Conservation Reserve Program*—In the face of increasing conversion of farm and forestland to other uses like commercial and residential development and the more recent proliferation of solar farms—especially in the southeastern United States—the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a critical incentive for keeping forests as forests. CRP-trees acres under contract have declined precipitously in the past decade and to reverse this trend, changes to current policy are needed. These include allowing more re-enrollment opportunities for stands of trees of all species on the condition they are being actively managed to maintain healthy stand conditions, financial support of mid-contract management through thinning and prescribed fire, and allowing for the eventuality of harvesting stands at maturity as part of sustainable forest management. CRP-tree contracts are a high priority for states in many parts of the country, especially the pine belt in the South. These policy needs would allow for states to retain discretion on setting their own priorities for CRP.
- *Modernizing Eligibility for the Forest Service's Volunteer Fire Assistance Program*—The Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program provides financial capacity to volunteer fire departments (VFDs) protecting small, rural communities. State and locals respond to 80 percent of wildland fires nationwide and with expansion of the wildland-urban interface, the frequency and complexity of fire has necessitated improved collaboration with volunteer organizations. However, the program's statutory eligibility requirements are over 40 years old and do not acknowledge the reduced volunteerism, population growth in areas served by existing VFDs, and some challenges in VFDs meeting the match requirements. NASF is aligned with the National Volunteer Fire Council and the International Association of Fire Chiefs in proposing changing the qualifying community population threshold from 10,000 to 15,000 or less, changing the percent volunteer firefighting personnel threshold from 80 percent to 70 percent or more, and allowing for Secretarial discretion on waiving match requirement for VFDs, similar to other fire and forestry programs.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today and provide testimony on behalf of NASF. We appreciate the ongoing work of this Subcommittee to provide Federal and state forest managers, as well as private landowners, with tools that increase the pace and scale of active forest management, cross-boundary work, and rapid and effective response to insects, disease and wildland fire. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee, the Full Committee, and our Federal partners to provide the collective insights of the nation's State Foresters in a final 2025 Farm Bill.

I look forward to answering any questions the Subcommittee may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Perfect. Thank you Ms. Barnes. Appreciate your testimony. I now will recognize our next witness, Mr. Scott Dane from the American Loggers Council. He is their executive director. Go ahead.

STATEMENT OF BRADLEY "SCOTT" DANE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN LOGGERS COUNCIL, GILBERT, MN

Mr. DANE. Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Committee Members, on behalf of the American Loggers Council, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding promoting forest health and resiliency through improved active management. I am the Executive Director of the American Loggers Council, which represents members in 49 states.

I would like to begin by addressing silviculture forest management, which is the science of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, and health of forests and woodlands, and societal objectives, such as producing timber, maintaining wildlife habitat, improving forest health, recreation, and protecting watersheds on

a sustainable basis. This is accomplished by a range of practices, including planting, thinning, and harvesting, to guide the development of forests stands for desired outcomes. These sustainable forest management activities are not being fully utilized on National Forests, particularly as they apply to timber harvesting over the past few decades.

The volume of timber harvest on National Forests has declined by over 75 percent. Additionally, silvicultural standards establish tree stand densities, trees per acre, that is optimal for achieving healthy forest objectives. According to top forest researchers, low-density stands that largely eliminate tree competition are key to creating forest resilience to the multiple stressors of severe wildfire, drought, bark beetles, and climate change. They conclude that managing for resilience requires drastically reducing densities, as much as 80 percent of trees in some cases.

Tree mortality for the first time, according to the U.S. Forest Service reports, exceeds tree growth by two times. Let me repeat that: twice as many trees are dying in the National Forests than are growing. Much of this mortality is driven by wildfire. It is not timber harvesting. Timber harvesting only represents 25 percent of the net tree growth, and seven times more trees are dying than are being harvested. Logging isn't the problem. In fact, it is a solution. These statistics clearly indicate that National Forest management policy for the past 3 decades has not worked. The health of our National Forests are in decline.

This brings me to wildfire. Millions of acres of forest burn annually. Fire science is basic. Three components are necessary for fire: an ignition source, quite often, lightning strikes, oxygen, and fuel. The only one that we can control is fuel, and in the case of wildfires, unhealthy forests that are overstocked and filled with dying and dead timber. In an effort to begin reducing hazardous fuels from National Forest lands, the American Loggers Council, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, developed a Biomass Transportation Incentive Pilot Project, which removed 120,000 green tons of hazardous fuels, primarily biomass, and utilized it as feedstock for biomass power generation. This successful demonstration evolved into the USDA U.S. Forest Service Hazardous Fuels Transportation Assistance Program that continues to remove hazardous fuels from the National Forest landscape. This public and private partnership is one of the many opportunities available to collaboratively mitigate wildfire threats and severity by reducing fuel loads and addressing the backlog of landscape treatment.

The U.S. Forest Service has developed a wildfire crisis strategy to begin addressing 50 million acres of high-risk forest firesheds. The primary component of the wildfire crisis strategy is fuel—timber—reduction. This Administration recognizes these facts and has issued numerous Executive Orders, initiated trade investigations, issued policy directives, and taken other actions to improve forest management and support the timber and forest products industries. These directives need to be codified to ensure their long-term implementation. This crisis is a problem decades in the making and will require decades to correct.

The most comprehensive legislation to codify this and other forest management reforms is the Fix Our Forests Act. Passing this

legislation will ensure the forest management and wildfire mitigation, regulations, policies, and procedures survive political cycles. With the new Congress and Administration, the American Loggers Council prepared a “Roadmap to Recovery” that identified the top seven priority issues and actionable Congressional administrative responses. I have included a copy with my testimony to be included in the Congressional record.

With over 150 mills closed across the United States in the past 36 months, markets are seriously compromised. To promote forest health and resiliency through improved active management, markets are necessary. No markets, no management. We are at a crossroads. Congress and the Administration must take action to improve forest health through active management before the logging and mill infrastructure deteriorates to a point that forest management will no longer be possible. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Dane follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BRADLEY “SCOTT” DANE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN LOGGERS COUNCIL, GILBERT, MN

Chairman LaMalfa and Committee Members, on behalf of the American Loggers Council, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding *Promoting Forest Health and Resiliency Through Improved Active Management*.

I am the Executive Director of the American Loggers Council which represents members in 49 states.

I would like to begin by addressing silviculture (forest management), which is the **science** of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, and health of forests and woodlands and societal objectives, such as producing timber, maintaining wildlife habitat, improving forest health, recreation, and protecting watersheds on a sustainable basis. This is accomplished by a range of practices including planting, thinning, and harvesting to guide the development of a forest stand for desired outcomes.

These sustainable forest management activities are not being fully utilized on our National Forests, particularly as they apply to timber harvesting. Over the past few decades, the volume of timber harvest on National Forests has declined by over 75%, from a high of 13 billion board-feet to 3 billion board-feet.

Additionally, silvicultural standards establish tree stand density (trees per acre) that is optimal for achieving healthy forest objectives. According to top forest researchers: “. . . low-density stands that largely eliminate tree competition are key to creating forests resilient to the multiple stressors of severe wildfire, drought, bark beetles and climate change.” They conclude that “managing for resilience requires drastically reducing densities—as much as 80% of trees, in some cases.”¹

Tree mortality for the first time (2016), according to USFS reports,² exceeds tree growth by two times. Let me repeat that—twice as many trees are dying in the National Forests than are growing. Much of this mortality is driven by wildfire. It is not timber harvesting. Timber harvesting is only 25% of the net tree growth, and seven times more trees are dying than are being harvested. Logging isn’t the problem; in fact, it is the solution. I have included a copy of this report for the Congressional record.

These statistics clearly indicate that National Forest management policy for the past 3 decades has not worked. The health of National Forests is in severe decline.

This brings me to wildfire. Millions of acres of forests burn annually. Fire **science** is basic. Three components are necessary for fire: an ignition source (quite often

¹Operational resilience in western US frequent-fire forests: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378112721010975?dgcid=author#preview-section-abstract

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²Annual Net Growth, Mortality, and Harvest on National Forest on National Forest Timberlands 1952–2016.

lightning strikes), oxygen, and fuel. The only one that we can control is fuel, and in the case of wildfires, unhealthy forests that are overstocked and filled with dying and dead timber.

In an effort to begin reducing hazardous fuels from National Forest lands, the American Loggers Council, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, developed the Biomass Transportation Incentive Pilot project that removed 120,000 green tons of hazardous fuels (primarily biomass) and utilized it as feedstock for biomass power generation. This successful demonstration evolved into the USDA/USFS Hazardous Fuels Transportation Assistance Program that continues to remove hazardous fuels from National Forest landscapes.

This public-private partnership is one of many opportunities available to collaboratively mitigate wildfire threats and severity by reducing fuel loads and addressing the backlog of landscape treatment.

The USFS has developed a Wildfire Crisis Strategy to begin addressing 50 million acres of high-risk forest fireheds. The primary component of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy is fuel (timber) reduction.

The Administration recognizes these facts and has issued numerous Executive Orders, initiated trade investigations, issued policy directives, and taken other actions to improve forest management and support the U.S. timber and forest products industries.

These directives need to be codified to ensure their long-term implementation. This crisis is a problem—decades in the making and it will require decades to correct. The most comprehensive legislation to codify this and other forest management reforms is the Fix Our Forests Act. Passing this legislation will ensure that forest management and wildfire mitigation regulations, policies, and procedures survive political cycles.

With the new Congress and Administration, the American Loggers Council prepared *A Road Map to Recovery*³ that identified the top seven priority issues and actionable Congressional and Administration responses. I have included a copy with my testimony to be included in the Congressional record.

With over 150 mills closed across the country in the past 36 months, markets are seriously compromised. To Promote Forest Health and Resiliency Through Improved Active Management, markets are necessary.

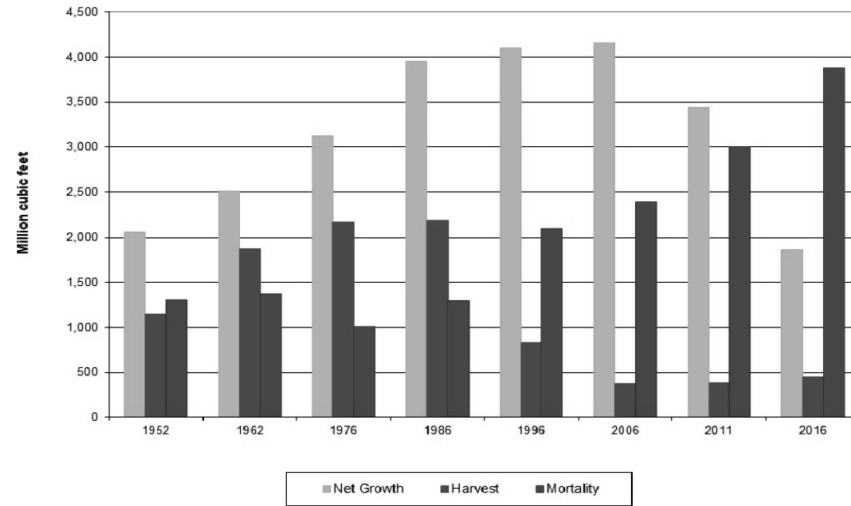
No Markets, No Management

We are at a crossroads. Congress and the Administration must take action to improve forest health through active management, before the logging and mill infrastructure deteriorates to a point that forest management will not be possible.

³*A Roadmap to Recovery*, American Loggers Council 2025.

ATTACHMENT 1

Annual Net Growth, Mortality, and Harvest on National Forest Timberlands—1952–2016



ATTACHMENT 2



The Dawn of a New Age in the American Timber Industry—A Road Map to Recovery



A Roadmap To Recovery of the U.S. Timber Industry

The American Timber Industry is in a serious state of decline that threatens the entire forest products (paper, lumber, bioenergy) industry and public-private healthy forest management goals and objectives. Human infrastructure continues to age (average logger age over 55) and employment within the logging sector is declining 2% annually over the past 20 years. The logging sector is the first link in the forest industry supply chain supporting 900,000 jobs, with a \$300 billion U.S. economic impact. All of this is supported by 50,000 timber industry workers employed by small family multigenerational logging and trucking businesses, without which the entire timber and forest products industry would collapse. These jobs are rural in nature, but supply materials for products that all of American society depends on daily.

The factors contributing to the decline of the U.S. timber and forest products industry have been identified and can be rectified through proper trade policy, active forest management practices, new forest products market development, maximizing transportation efficiency, workforce development, de-weaponizing obstructionist litigation, and favorable tax policy.

All of the challenges and threats to the timber and forest products industry can be boiled down to one common denominator—**markets**. Markets drive investment, investment drives development, development drives competition, competition drives profitability, profitability drives competitiveness, and competitiveness drives wages/benefits.

The following information identifies the priority issues and actions that can serve as a road map to the recovery of the U.S. timber and forest products industry that Congress and the Administration must undertake.



National Forest Management

Issue: National Forest Management

There is an obvious correlation between areas where declining National Forest management dominates the landscape—and the occurrence of unhealthy, overgrown and dense forests plagued by disease, infestation and wildfire.

This National Forest decline creates a self-fulfilling downward spiral of reduced timber management and harvest volume leading to a loss of forest products mills/markets, which is then used to justify continued reduction in timber sales volume that is inadequate to support the supply needs of existing markets thereby causing the failure of remaining markets and perpetuating the circular downward spiral of forest health and industry. The end result of this harmful National Forest situation is forest deterioration by fire, disease and infestation. This deterioration fails to comply with the National Forest Management Act of 1976, which requires the U.S. Forest Service “to maintain effective land management”.

National Forest Plans identify the Allowable Sale Quantity that can be harvested during a 10 year period, while maintaining sustainability based on areas suitable for timber production. The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have failed to achieve this volume during the past 3 decades.

The U.S. Forest Service currently harvests approximately 3 billion board-feet of lumber, compared to 13 billion board-feet 40 years ago. Today, the U.S. Forest Service spends more of their budget on wildfire response than forest management. Ironically, of the nearly 30,000 U.S. Forest Service employees, just 3% are foresters.

In Minnesota, where the National Forests represent 11% of the forested land, it only contributes 4% of harvested timber. This trend is significantly multiplied in regions (western states) where the majority of public lands is managed by national agencies. These areas also experience higher mortality, wildfire, overstocking, and lost infrastructure. In contrast, regions that are majority privately managed land, forest health and markets are more productive, healthy and stable.

The U.S. has an abundant renewable resource that can be sustainably managed to provide raw material for lumber and other forest products production ***if active forest management is returned to the public landscape.***

A commitment to increased forest management timber harvest volume will enable the remaining forest products industry infrastructure to maintain sustainability while conveying a commitment that will secure additional investment and growth.

Thus, reversing the decline in National Forest management and timber industry infrastructure, as well as wildfire severity.

The National Forests will be critical to support the development and expansion of domestic softwood lumber markets and the reduction in softwood lumber imports as noted in the first issue.

Many rural counties and schools historically benefited from far greater National Forest timber sales revenue, due to their proximity to National Forests and the statutory timber harvest revenue sharing with counties and schools from those National Forests. In response to a reduction in timber management and sales—critical county and school revenues paid by National Forests have declined. To offset the losses and stabilize the revenue stream, Secure Rural Schools Funding (SRS) was established by Congress in 2000, which provides revenue to counties and schools. The Secure Rural Schools Funding represents a small fraction of county and school revenue received 40 years ago (In 2024, \$250 million annually for 775 rural counties and 4,400 rural schools across the country). However, the Secure Rural Schools Funding expired at the end of 2024.

Many policies, actions and Executive Orders are politically-driven to support environmental agendas, but have the unintended consequence of further obstructing active forest management. However, recent legislation has been introduced that would address and correct existing ill-conceived policies, actions and Executive Orders that are being abused in the furtherance of obstructing healthy forest management.

Action: *Manage National Forests*

- The Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA) is comprehensive legislation that would address many of the known shortcomings and challenges that are inhibiting proper forest management. This FOFA bill should be priority legislation passed to immediately realign the healthy forest management objectives for the National Forests.
- Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS) reauthorization would be most effective when paired with the Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA). Passing these two bills together would accomplish the dual benefits of improving National Forest management **and** maintaining vital National Forest management revenue source for rural counties, schools, forest management infrastructure, and vibrant rural forest communities.
- The U.S. Forest Service must increase active forest management and timber harvest as per their current volume “target”. This National Forest target is typically $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the legally-authorized Allowable Sale Quantity; and even at that reduced volume is rarely achieved. In Alaska, the second largest National Forest, the Chugach has zero timber harvest planned.
- Litigation Reform is addressed in the Fix Our Forest Act. Additionally, require litigating parties challenging USFS forest management plans and activities to have “standing” and to post bonds sufficient to cover the costs of defense, loss of property/lives due to delay, and timber contract holder lost revenue should the challenge be denied.
- Direct the USFS to cease efforts based on EO 14072 to inventory “mature and old growth timber”.
- Reform the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Multiple bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives to amend NEPA, which would address flaws in the statute that have resulted in unreasonable timelines and litigation.
- Pass a Congressional Review Act rescinding the uplisting of the Northern Long Eared Bat from Threatened to Be Endangered. This was passed in the House and Senate with bipartisan support in 2023 but vetoed by President Biden.

Trade Policy

Issue: *Trade Policy*

The U.S. is the leading global importer of softwood lumber. The primary source is Canada, followed by Brazil and China as well as Europe. The U.S. continues to import wood products (plywood) from Russia. In fact, manufactured wood products constituted over 50% of the trade between the U.S. and Russia in 2024, increasing 53% in the latter half of 2024. All while record numbers (100+) of forest products mills close in the U.S., millions of acres of U.S. forests burn annually, and over 10,000 jobs have been lost in the timber and forest products industries in the past 24 months.

Clearly the U.S. demand and market exists for softwood lumber. The U.S. should not be supporting the timber industry of other countries at the demise of the U.S. forests and industry.

Additionally, in some cases, raw timber is shipped from the U.S. (due to a lack of domestic mills that have gone offshore) to countries that process it into finished products and then ship it back to the U.S. markets.

The U.S. practices third party certification silvicultural based forest management which ensures sustainable management of U.S. forests. Today's U.S. timberlands exceed the acres of timberlands from 100 years ago. U.S. forest management practices do not result in deforestation. The only deforestation that occurs in the U.S. is due to urban development and massive solar farms. Imposing additional redundant administrative management requirements, as per the European Union Deforestation Regulations, only adds more time and expense to the operations and reduces efficiency and competitiveness.

Action: Fair Trade

- Enact trade policy, including tariffs, to level the playing field and allow for U.S. forest management, U.S. raw material harvesting, U.S. forest products production, and create U.S. jobs.
- Enact and enforce a full ban on Russian origin lumber.
- Inform the European Union that the United States has strict sustainable forestry practices and standards recognized and, in some cases, originating in Europe that ensure no deforestation practices are conducted. In fact, the forested area of the United States has increased over what it was 100 years ago. Therefore, the U.S. will not be implementing the unnecessary requirement of the ill-conceived European Union Deforestation Regulations (EUDR). The EUDR is an environmental driven initiative to further obstruct the timber industry, add uncompensated costs, and generally a solution looking for a problem where, regarding the U.S., one does not exist.

Safer Transportation

Issue: Interstate Truck Weight Restrictions

The U.S. transportation policy and inconsistencies creates a competitive burden for agricultural products, including raw timber. Weight limits on the Federal interstate systems vary drastically for timber products, although it is the same interstate system. Foreign transportation policy allows for heavier transportation weights than parts of the United States.

Log Truck Weight Limits Examples

Canada (national roadways)	140,000 (up to) pounds based on configuration
Michigan (164,000)	164,000 pounds w/11 axles
New England (2010 pilot, 2017 permanent)	100,000/99,000 pounds w/6 axles (Maine/Vermont)
Minnesota (2015. Limited to 23 miles)	99,000 Winter w/6 axles
Mississippi (2024)	88,000 pounds w/5 axles
Wisconsin (2015. Limited to designated routes)	100,000 winter w/6 axles
North Carolina (new interstates grandfathered in at state weights)	88,000 pounds w/5 axles

Aside from these variances, states are restricted to 80,000 pounds on their respective interstates.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation, the University of Georgia, State of Mississippi, State of Maine, and other sources have conducted studies and analysis of the road impacts, safety, braking capacity, fuel consumption (mpg), CO₂ emissions, miles traveled, and truck trips of various configurations of logging trucks using the Federal interstate system. All have concluded that there are benefits in every category, particularly safety.

A recent study found that nearly 78% of all log truck fatal crashes occurred in the Southeast region of the U.S. In these states, oncoming cars infringing on the logging trucks' lanes were the leading cause of logging truck accidents.

Routing these trucks off rural roadways, school zones, residential neighborhoods, pedestrian areas, and narrower two-lane opposing traffic routes will reduce accidents and improve safety.

The State of Maine documented a reduction in logging truck accidents after they were authorized to access the Federal interstate system.

Logging truck interstate access is already authorized in many states. The Federal precedent has been established in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Mississippi, Maine, Vermont, North Carolina, and Michigan. Identical language and legislation should

extend Federal interstate access to allow log trucks already operating on local, county and state roads in each state as per their own criteria to utilize the Federal interstate road system. The *Safe Routes Act* has been introduced in Congress with Bipartisan support annually.

Additionally, the commercial trucking sector is experiencing severe a driver shortage with a projected 60,000 commercial truck drivers needed. This is even more pronounced within the log truck driving category due to the unique aspects of hauling logs. Improving transportation efficiency will enable the log trucking sector of the timber industry to do more with less.

Action: *Improving Transportation Safety and Efficiency*

Congress must immediately pass the “*Safe Routes Act*” to universally provide the authorization of each respective state to pass legislation at the state level extending access to the Federal interstate systems as per their current weight limits and criteria.

- The Administration should issue an Executive Order authorizing states to authorize commercial trucks currently operating within their intrastate road system (non-Federal), and at weights/configurations to extend operation of these commercial vehicles to the Federal interstate system.
- Incentivize commercial truck driver entry through refundable tax credits of up to \$7,500 for Class A Commercial Drivers License (CDL) operators as per the bipartisan 2022 “*Strengthening Supply Chains Through Truck Driver Incentives Act*.”

Renewable Fuel Standard

Issue: *Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS)*

The Renewable Fuel Standard was established by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and expanded by the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 for the purpose of; reducing the country’s reliance on foreign oil; grow the renewable energy industry; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The program is implemented by the EPA in “consultation” with USDA and DOE.

There are four renewable fuel categories:

- Biomass based diesel
- Cellulosic biofuels
- Advanced biofuel
- Total renewable fuel

Within these categories there are five subcategories or silos describing the various Renewable Index Numbers (RIN’s) per specific type of renewable fuel. The D3 and D7 RIN’s are cellulosic based produced from cellulose, hemicellulose, or lignin. This would include forest-based feedstock.

D3 and D7 cellulosic renewable fuels have never been commercially produced and is confirmed by the EPA who have developed Cellulosic Waiver Credits due to “recognizing the short-term difficulty in attaining required volumes of cellulosic standards.”

However, there are billions of dollars in investment prepared to produce D3 and D7 cellulosic renewable fuels, including sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) upon approval of project pathway applications. The only obstacles are EPA’s timely Pathway application response and approval and overly restrictive “interpretation” of eligible forest-based feedstock (contrary to USDA USFS consultation). There are millions of tons of unmerchantable timber, biomass and hazardous fuels available as feedstock for the production of D3 and D7 cellulosic renewable fuels.

The USFS Wildfire Crisis Strategy recognizes the need to treat 50 million acres, including hazardous fuels that are feeding the wildfires. The challenge is what to do with this otherwise unmerchantable biomass. The answer is to use it as feedstock for renewable fuels production.

The EPA’s position on Pathway Application processing is to address each application on a case-by-case basis. This creates uncertainty and delays the collective processing of similar projects. Approval of the known projects to produce cellulosic renewable fuels will compliment the U.S. energy independence agenda and produce new and much needed forest product markets.

Nearly 15 years ago the EPA recognized that electricity derived from renewable biomass qualified as a renewable transportation fuel as part of the 2010 RFS2 Rule, but the EPA has failed to comply with the language in their own rule and activate the electric pathway. With the emergence of electric vehicles, which represent 9%

of vehicle market share, the EPA's delay jeopardizes legally obligated revenue streams and fiscal viability of these biomass electric generation facilities.

The EPA has failed to implement the full scope of the RFS as per the Congressional Intent.

The EPA Office of Transportation and Air Quality (OTAQ), Office of Air and Radiation (OAR) does not have the background, understanding, or expertise of forest-based cellulosic feedstock and forest management practices to effectively administer or process the Pathway Applications for D3 and D7 RIN's projects. EPA has not collectively deferred to USDA/USFS expertise, advice, and direction regarding forest management practices and timber source marketing/value.

Action: RFS Administration

- The RFS program must be moved from OTAQ, OAR to the USDA/USFS or other administration authority that is knowledgeable in forest-based feedstock (biomass, hazardous fuels, unmerchantable timber, cull wood, *etc.*) or headed by a political appointee with a Memorandum of Understanding with the USDA/USFS.
- All Pathway Applications must be reviewed, processed and approved/dis-approved within ninety days of submission.
- Recognize forest-based biomass as a renewable carbon neutral feedstock for electrical power generation and renewable fuel production, as practiced by the rest of the developed global countries.
- Include e-RIN's (renewable electricity generated from forest-based renewable feedstock) as eligible for RIN credits. This renewable energy displaces petroleum-based fuel and can be traced to electric vehicle charging. Therefore, it accomplishes the goals of the "reducing the country's reliance on foreign oil; grows the renewable energy industry (particularly hazardous fuels identified in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy); and reduces greenhouse gas emissions." These facilities can address the projected demand for additional baseload electricity to feed the grid more readily, cost-effectively, and quickly than larger traditional power plants while replacing the many coal power plants that are shutdown or scheduled for shutdown.
- Amend EPA's biomass definition in the proposed Renewable Volume Obligations (RVO) rule pending issuance in March 2025 to expand "biomass obtained from certain areas at risk of wildfire **from 200 feet to 1.5 miles** of buildings or other areas regularly occupied by people, or of public infrastructure."

Workforce Development

Issue: Workforce Development

The demographics of the timber industry workforce are well documented to be aging, with over half 55+ years old (2017) and a declining total workforce of 2% annually as referenced. Surveys of existing logging businesses also revealed the majority were owned by individuals 55 years or older. Many of their succession plans do not include passing on the family business but instead closing the business. This aging workforce and ownership is going to compound the workforce shortage in the next 5–10 years.

- Wage and Benefit Competitiveness
- Seasonality
- Profitability
- Public Perception/Image

There has been trade school programs developed around the country; however, they typically train small numbers (10–12 students) per session.

Starting or maintaining a logging business is capital intensive requiring millions of dollars in investment, with the profit margins of 1–3% for many companies, and significant risk and uncertainty. Most logging companies do not have binding volume or price contracts with mills that they do business with. Volumes and rates paid are commonly reduced by the mills with a phone call, text, or letter with minimal recourse from the logger.

Seasonal harvest windows have created operational restrictions that render employment within the sector as seasonal. Maintaining a skilled workforce in a seasonally limited environment is challenging and undermines the employment sustainability within the logging workforce. Coupled with long hours, harsh environment, and operational hazards without commiserate compensation and benefits, these factors have a negative impact in attracting young new workers into the industry.

Logging businesses are small family-owned multigenerational agricultural businesses very similar to farming. In recognition of the workforce structure and succession of farming businesses, farmers are able to integrate their family members that are 16–17 years old in the “mechanized” operation of farming equipment to facilitate learning the operations and for future succession.

Exemptions to the Hazardous Occupations (HO) Orders do not apply to youth employed or operated by their parents. At age 16 minors can perform any farm job, including those declared hazardous by the Secretary of Labor. In other occupations minors are not allowed to perform hazardous work until the age of 18. Ref. U.S. Department of Labor

Loggers are not currently specifically permitted this exemption, although the Department of Labor Child Labor Bulletin 102 states:

The Hazardous Occupations (HO) Orders for Agricultural Employment, Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) provides a minimum age of 16 years for any agricultural occupations which the Secretary of Labor finds and declares to be particularly hazardous for persons under the age of 16. The Secretary of Labor has found and declared that the following occupations are hazardous for minors under 16 years of age: Felling, bucking, skidding, loading or unloading timber with butt diameter of more than 6”[.]

This could be interpreted to allow for “logging operations” to be conducted by agricultural workers 16 years and older.

Note: Contrary to Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting (i.e., Logging Industry Most Dangerous Occupation), a review of all injury and fatality reports found the reporting criteria is skewed and misleading. The American Loggers Council met with the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington DC to review their data. That meeting revealed that the report of fatalities per 100,000 (98/100,000) employees was extrapolated since there are only 40,000–50,000 loggers in the workforce and for the year reviewed was actually 47 fatalities. Of those, 80% were non-mechanized operations (i.e., chainsaws and hand-felling) and some were log truck accidents. When adjusted for these factors, actual mechanized logging operations fatalities would be approximately ten per year or extrapolated to be $^{20}/_{100000}$ —comparable to the agricultural sector at $^{23}/_{100000}$, the second highest fatality rate.

Action: Logging is Agriculture

- The same opportunity for family members 16–17 years old to operate “mechanized” logging equipment should be extended to family logging businesses. The mechanization of the logging industry is the single largest factor that has contributed to improving safety. This legislation has been introduced with bipartisan support into Congress for many years in the form of the *Future Logging Careers Act*. This is the most readily available pipeline for workforce entry and family business succession.
- Trade schools specializing in logging industry workforce training should receive Federal support and investment to provide cost free tuition to prospective students. Efforts to recruit at risk, under-served demographics, including an emphasis on rural and urban areas should be a targeted focus. Employers hiring from these programs should receive an “apprentice” tax credit for the first year.

Taxes

Issue: Tax Burden Holding Back Investment

The Federal Excise Tax on heavy trucks was first enacted in 1917 (3%) to help pay for World War I and is the highest excise tax levied by the Federal Government. Over the course of 100 years the tax was repealed (1924), reinstated (1932 at 2% due to the depression), increased in 1941 (2.5%) and 1941 (5%) during WWII, 1951 (8% due to the Korean War), 1956 (10% for the formation of the National Interstate Highway Program), 1972 scheduled to be reduced to 5%, but due to ongoing interstate construction and overruns is maintained at 10%, 1975 Senate votes to repeal, but House does not, 1982 increased to 12% and extended to present day.

This tax adds more than \$30,000 to the cost of new trucks and trailers. Off-highway equipment such as agriculture, earthmoving, forestry and mining machinery are exempt from the tax. This tax is paid at the time of sale on new trucks (not used since the excise tax has already been levied when new), which consequently incentivizes the purchase of used trucks over new trucks.

The Federal Excise Tax on new over the road trucks disincentivizes purchasing new trucks that are safer, more efficient, and produce less carbon emissions. Half

of the Class 8 trucks on the road today are over 10 years old and lack the cleaner technologies and fuel efficiency gains of today's new trucks.

The price of conventional diesel trucks (\$150,000+) has increased over 50% in 10 years, and the price of electric trucks (\$250,000+) is nearly double the price of a standard diesel truck. The Federal Excise Tax is 12%. While the taxable value has increased significantly, the Federal Excise Tax has remained the same, generating a disproportionate amount of additional revenue at the expense of the consumer.

The timber industry provides the forest-based feedstock to biomass power plants. These markets are critical to comprehensive forest management operations and particularly the removal of hazardous fuels. In the realm of the renewable energy environment (wind, solar, biomass) 60% of renewable energy consumed in the U.S. is derived from biomass according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. However, the biomass renewable energy sector is at risk of losing IRS tax code sections 45Y and 48E production and investment tax credits in the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 due to a lack of guidance from the Biden Administration. This creates an untenable uncertainty for renewable biomass power facilities.

Action: *Reduce Taxes to Support Economic Investment and Growth*

- Reduce or eliminate the Federal Excise Tax on Commercial Trucks. This funding (\$5 billion annually) has been included in the Highway Trust Fund. The question is how to keep the Highway Trust Fund whole with the elimination or reduction in this revenue stream.
- Considering the significant increase in truck and trailer value over the past 10 years, a 50% reduction in the Federal Excise Tax, from 12% to 6% would theoretically generate the same revenue as 2013.
- Another alternative would be to backfill the Federal Excise Tax revenue with a 2.5¢ per gallon fuel tax. The U.S. consumes 135 billion gallons of gas annually and 45 billion gallons of diesel fuel. A 2.5¢ per gallon tax will generate \$4.5 billion annually. This would allow for the full elimination of the Federal Excise Tax.
- Transferring the fee to the actual vehicles impacting the Highway system upon annual registration is a simple alternative that will capture all vehicles including electric vehicles. With 283,000,000 private vehicles and three million commercial trucks, a flat \$20 per vehicle registration annually will fully offset the \$5 billion current Federal Excise Tax.
- Regarding Clean Electricity Production and Investment Tax Credits (Sections 45Y, 48E and 45Z) for Renewable Biomass Power generating facilities, Congress and the Administration must provide immediate clarity through the Department of Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service of eligibility. The lack of direction and certainty from the Biden Administration has left the renewable biomass industry in a compromised position that threatens the vital role these facilities represent in renewable energy production, timber industry markets, forest management and wildfire mitigation.

Disaster Assistance

Issue: *Preserving Critical Infrastructure*

Natural disasters impact the agricultural sector through floods, hurricanes, droughts, infestations and wildfires. The USDA Federal Crop Insurance Program protects agricultural producers from losses due to natural disasters or price fluctuations.

Timber Is Agriculture. However, timber crops do not receive similar protection. Loggers represent critical infrastructure and were deemed essential during the Pandemic. The Pandemic Assistance for Harvesters and Haulers (PATHH) provided funding (\$200 million) to offset the financial losses during this period.

Due to recent hurricanes, drought and beetle infestations \$1.6 billion is being considered to provide assistance to private timberland owners to recover from losses associated with natural disasters.

Preserving private timberlands and the service contractor infrastructure is necessary to support the entire forest products industry. Assistance programs in response (after the fact) to natural and economic disasters do not provide certainty, encourage investment, nor provide timely assistance. The need for these assurances for other agricultural sectors is recognized and available. Establishing standing programs for the timber industry will provide parity and protection that other agriculture commodities receive.

Action

- Pass the bipartisan *Loggers Economic Assistance and Relief Act* that has been introduced in the House and Senate.



Gifford Pinchot famously wrote in *Breaking New Ground*, “Forestry is Tree Farming. Forestry is handling trees so that one crop follows another. To grow trees as a crop is Forestry.”

The father of forestry and the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service

Contact

Scott Dane, Executive Director, executivedirector@americanloggerscouncil.com, 202-627-6961



“First and foremost, you can never afford to forget for one moment what is the object of the forest policy. Primarily that object is not to preserve forests because they are beautiful—though that is good in itself—not to preserve them because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness—though that too is good in itself—but the primary objective of the forest policy as of the land policy of the United States, is the making of prosperous homemaking of our country. Every other consideration comes as secondary. The whole effort of the government in dealing with the forests must be directed to this end.”

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The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Dane. Appreciate your testimony.

We will now go to our next witness Carrie Monohan, who is the Director of Natural Resources at the Mooretown Rancheria of Maidu Indians in northern California. You have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CARRIE MONOHAN, Ph.D., DIRECTOR OF
NATURAL RESOURCES, MOORETOWN RANCHERIA OF MAIDU
INDIANS, OROVILLE, CA**

Dr. MONOHAN. Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and other Subcommittee Members, for the opportunity to speak here today.

As you recognized in your remarks, we face a nationwide forest health crisis, and in the West, fires are the number one public safety, forest health, and environmental concern. Healthy forests are critical to the environment and to the economy, to rural communities and to Tribes. Tribal governments, like Mooretown Rancheria, a federally-recognized Tribe in northern California, can be a force multiplier to address this crisis, and we are already doing so through an innovative model using the Service First authority.

Committee Members likely recall the Camp Fire, which destroyed the Town of Paradise and took 85 lives in 2018. But since that time, we have also faced the 320,000 acre North Complex fire, the million acre Dixie Fire, and just last year, the Park Fire. Our community is ground zero of the National Forest health crisis, and while we have cultural and economic purposes for our forest management efforts, it is also a matter of necessity. I am here today to tell you about the Service First model, which can be used to rapidly address forest management needs across the nation without requiring new legislation or regulatory changes. At the same time, using Service First with Tribes can support Tribal economic development and bring to bear the skills and knowledge of those who have managed our forest for thousands of years.

Under the Service First model, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Forest Service enter into an interagency agreement, including Mooretown as an implementing partner. Forest Service funds are transferred to the Interior, then to a trust account held on the Tribe's behalf, and as work is completed, the Tribe is reimbursed for expenses incurred. It is important to note that Mooretown does not just work on our reservation and does not just work on the aboriginal territories of the Tribe, but that we provide forest management anywhere it is needed. For example, when Congress appropriated wildfire crisis funding, that funding was directed to National Forests designated as wildfire crisis landscapes. A number of National Forests in California and Nevada initiated interagency agreements with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Mooretown to fund fuels reduction and ecosystem-enhancement projects. This included removing hazard trees, creating fuel breaks in the wildland-urban interface, and road repair to restore access.

Our crews are working as I speak on fuels reduction projects under those agreements, using both hand crews and a fleet of large equipment like masticators and log processors. However, we have experienced some challenges in working with the Forest Service under this model. We found that Forest Service personnel can be hesitant to use new tools like the Service First model unless they already have done so previously. We have found that capacity challenges in some of the districts have actually precluded them from approving projects supported by outside grant funding. Even when funding is available, environmental review complete, and we have

an existing interagency agreement, we rely on Forest Service personnel to prepare scopes of work. We found that remaining staff often have not been trained to develop these key planning materials, and we have seen an exodus of older, experienced personnel.

To address many of these challenges, we have hired retired Forest Service employees, who can write the scopes of work and that are from the districts we work in, know what work is ready to proceed, and can coordinate with remaining Forest Service staff to help them use existing agreements and create new ones. In addition, we have had preliminary discussions with Forest Service leadership about developing training to ensure personnel are familiar with the Service First model and know its advantages. We are fighting a war on catastrophic wildfire, and we are trying to get ahead of it with basic forestry practices while recovering from decades of forest mismanagement in an era where the Forest Service is reeling from major personnel reductions. In summary, Mooretown forestry has demonstrated that Tribes using interagency agreements with the BIA and Forest Service is the most efficient means of deploying forest management funding, and it is working. Looking forward, we hope that the Committee will support more widespread adoption of the Service First model, help us secure training for Forest Service personnel, and, when appropriating forest management and wildfire crisis funding, recognize that Service First is the most efficient means of getting projects underway.

Finally, I would like to close by thanking Chairman LaMalfa for his long-term support of the Tribe and our forestry program, and Chairman Thompson and Chairman LaMalfa for visiting us in northern California to view the impacts of wildfire firsthand, and for inviting the Tribe here today.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Monohan follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CARRIE MONOHAN, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF NATURAL RESOURCES, MOORETOWN RANCHERIA OF MAIDU INDIANS, OROVILLE, CA

Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, thank you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee. As you recognized in your remarks, we face a nationwide forest health crisis and in the West fires are the number one public safety, forest health, and environmental concern. Healthy forests are critical to the environment and the economy, to rural communities and Tribes. Tribal governments like Mooretown Rancheria, a federally recognized Tribe in northern California, can be a force multiplier to address this crisis, and we are already doing so through an innovative model using the Service First authority.

Mooretown Rancheria is located in Butte County, California. The Maidu peoples' ancestral lands stretch from Mount Lassen in the North to the Yuba River in the South, from the Sacramento River in the West over the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains to Honey Lake in the East. Within these lands are three National Forests and a National Park, along with several state parks and other public lands. Mooretown's members historically worked largely in California's forest products industry and many lived in the town of Feather Falls, until it was destroyed by wildfire in 2020. Today Mooretown has a small reservation near the City of Oroville, though we also manage nearby Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands through co-management and co-stewardship agreements.

Subcommittee Members likely recall the Camp Fire, which destroyed the Town of Paradise and took 85 lives in 2018, but since that time we have also faced the 320,000 acre North Complex fire, which killed 15 and destroyed 2,500 structures; the million acre Dixie Fire, the largest fire in California history; and, just last year, the 430,000 acre Park Fire, the fourth-largest in California history. Our community is ground zero of the National Forest health crisis, and while we have cultural and economic purposes for our forest management efforts, it is also a matter of necessity.

I am here today to tell you about our use of the Service First authority to provide forest management for the U.S. Forest Service (“USFS”) as a federally recognized Tribe, allowing us to deploy funds appropriated by Congress in a timely manner, often within weeks, and respond to this crisis at the pace and scale that it requires. The Service First model can be used to rapidly address hazardous conditions and other forest management needs across the nation, without requiring new legislation or regulatory changes. At the same time, using Service First with Tribes can support Tribal economic development and bring to bear the skills and knowledge of those who have managed our forests for thousands of years.

We participate in Interagency Agreements between the USFS and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) through Service First Authority, which enables USDA and the Interior Department to share Federal resources to efficiently complete projects. Without the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ California Central Forestry Department, a critical partner, we would not be able to conduct thousands of acres of fuels reduction for the Forest Service as we have every year since 2017.

Under this Service First model, BIA and USFS enter into an Interagency Agreement including Mooretown as an implementing partner; USFS funds are transferred to Interior, then to a trust account held on the Tribe’s behalf; finally, we begin project implementation and are reimbursed as we submit expenses to BIA for work completed. The process allows us to initiate work as soon as funds are placed in our trust account, while maintaining strict Federal accounting and reporting requirements.

It’s important to note that Mooretown does not just work on our reservation and the aboriginal territories of the Tribe, but that we provide forest management anywhere it is needed. For example, when Congress appropriated Wildfire Crisis funding, that funding was directed to the many National Forests designated as Wildfire Crisis Landscapes. A number of National Forests in California and Nevada initiated Interagency Agreements with the BIA and Mooretown to fund forest fuels and ecosystem enhancement projects; this included removing hazard trees, creating fuel breaks in the wildland-urban interface, and road repair to restore public and management access. Our Tribal member-led crews are working as I speak on fuels reduction projects under these agreements, using both hand crews and a fleet of large equipment like masticators and log processors. When the Tribe conducts work outside of its ancestral lands, we partner with local Tribes to train and employ their members, helping them build capacity to take on their own projects in the future.

Through this Service First model, the Tribe has partnered with BIA and other Federal agencies to conduct nearly \$40 million of forest treatments since Mooretown Forestry Contract Services began operating. We have completed over 10,000 acres of fuels reduction, cleared hundreds of miles of roads of post-fire hazards, and built fuel breaks to make communities safer and our forests healthier.

We could not do this work without our partners at BIA Forestry, who serve a critical role in developing agreements, processing funding, and coordinating with USFS. We are also grateful for the many USFS personnel who recognize the unique benefits the Service First model provides, and who have energetically worked with us to deploy our teams wherever they can be most effective.

The Tribe does use other types of agreements, including a Master Service Agreement with Plumas National Forest, our closest partner, and hopes to enter Good Neighbor Authority to allow us to more efficiently and quickly move forest products, including timber, off the landscape. We are grateful for the Committee’s efforts to address Good Neighbor Authority and are hopeful that the Fix Our Forests Act is enacted this year.

However, we have experienced some challenges in working with USFS under the Service First model:

- We’ve found that USFS personnel can be hesitant to use new tools like our Service First model unless they have already done so previously. At times funding transfers have been delayed because of a disconnect between USFS field staff, who understand our model, and grants and agreements staff, who may not have experience with it.
- Capacity challenges in some USFS districts have actually precluded them from approving projects supported by outside grant funding, preventing valuable work which does not rely on Federal funding.
- Even when funding is available, environmental review is complete, and we have an existing Interagency Agreement, we must rely upon USFS personnel to prepare a scope of work. Younger staff often haven’t been trained to develop these key planning materials, and we’ve seen an exodus of older, experienced personnel.

- At times we've also been told we should work directly with USFS, rather than use the Service First model with BIA participation. Service First is often superior to other agreement types because it is less cumbersome, faster, and does not require the Tribe to sign a limited waiver of sovereign immunity.

To address many of these challenges, and to stop the bleeding, we have hired retired USFS personnel who can write scopes of work, and that are from the districts we work in, know what work is ready to proceed, and can coordinate with remaining USFS staff to help them use existing agreements and create new ones.

We have had preliminary discussions with USFS leadership about developing training to ensure personnel are familiar with the Service First model and know its advantages. I am hopeful that the Committee will support this effort, and appreciate Chief Schultz's willingness to discuss this concern with us.

The Tribe is also working to develop an overarching MOU with the BIA to provide a firm structure to the Service First model, in part to reassure USFS personnel of the process and also to make our interactions with both agencies more predictable, routine, and durable.

We are fighting a war on catastrophic wildfire and we are trying to get ahead of it with basic forestry practices, while recovering from decades of forest mismanagement in an era where the Forest Service is reeling from major personnel reductions. In our region, that mismanagement began with the onslaught of the California Gold Rush and resulted in mass genocide and displacement of the communities that had managed the forests for millennia. The Tribe truly believes that if we take care of the Forests, they will take care of us; that rural communities are in need of wildfire protection; that watersheds are in need of forest management to protect water supplies for humans and wildlife; and, that key habitats hang on a razor's edge, vulnerable to being wiped out by a single fire.

In summary, Mooretown Forestry has demonstrated that Tribes using Interagency Agreements with the BIA and USFS are the fastest means of deploying forest management funding, and certainly faster than using nonprofit partners that rely upon the same laborious contracting requirements as the USFS. Mooretown can and does just get out there and do the work.

We are honored to come here to tell you that the Service First model of working with BIA and USFS using Interagency Agreements is working. We are proud of how much we have done, but recognize how much more work is needed. Looking forward, we hope that the Committee will support more widespread adoption of the Service First model, help us secure training for USFS personnel, and, when appropriating forest management and wildfire crisis funding, recognize that Service First is the fastest means of getting projects underway.

Finally, I would like to close by thanking Chairman LaMalfa for his long-term support of the Tribe and our Forestry program, and Chairman Thompson for visiting us in northern California, viewing the impacts of wildfire firsthand, and inviting the Tribe here today to testify.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks again, Dr. Monohan. Appreciate your testimony, and we will listen to our final witness, Dr. Thomas DeLuca, the Dean of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. You have 5 minutes. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF THOMAS H., DELUCA, PH.D., DEAN, COLLEGE OF FORESTRY, OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY; DIRECTOR, OREGON FOREST RESEARCH LABORATORY, OSU, CORVALLIS, OR

Dr. DELUCA. Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tom DeLuca. I serve as the Dean of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University.

Decades of timber harvest and fire suppression on Federal forestlands, followed by a precipitous decline in active management starting in the 1980s, resulted in a large portion of Federal forests being dangerously overstocked, vulnerable to insects and disease, and at high risk of high-severity wildfires. I applaud meaningful actions that can accelerate and increase science-informed forest management to improve forest health and resilience. The current

Administration has prioritized action on Federal forestlands. There are, however, key challenges that put the potential for success at risk. I encourage this Committee to consider the following: can the Federal Government effectively achieve the desired management outcomes while reducing Federal workforce and research capacity? Second, given that we are far behind in addressing the Federal forests' condition, it is imperative that we focus precisely on where work needs to be done.

For the greatest potential for success, I offer three points for your consideration. First, Federal reductions in force and restructuring proposals undermine our collective ability to ramp up localized active management. Secretary Rollins issued a memorandum on July 24 to propose reorganization plans for the U.S. Forest Service to centralize personnel and resources in regional hubs. While this may offer administrative efficiencies, this action risks undermining the foundation of effective natural resource management by losing local knowledge and partnerships, trust, and ecological specificity that is critical to effective natural resource management. Workforce reductions initiated earlier this year are already constraining Federal capacity. The agency's research and development arm has dropped by about 25 percent, or nearly 400 permanent employees, since 2024. Over the same period, the Pacific Northwest Research Station, co-located on OSU's Corvallis campus, staff has declined by 60 positions, or 24 percent. These rapid reductions act to destabilize the agency being tasked with advancing enhanced management on our National Forests.

Second, U.S. Forest Service research enterprise reductions hinder science-informed management practices to support forest health and productivity. Our forests face ever-evolving threats, such as increasingly hot, dry conditions, novel insects and pathogens, and exotic plants. Science must be done to evolve with these novel threats. The U.S. Forest Service plays a critical role in advancing and translating science for active management to address these complex challenges. Equally important is the role of the U.S. Forest Service's Experimental Forest Network. Long-term ecological data collection at sites, such as the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in Oregon, have provided irreplaceable insights into how forests function for more than 75 years. No other government agency or industry outside of the U.S. Forest Service is positioned to replace those losses in scientific work currently advanced by the agency.

Third and final, rescinding the Roadless Rule distracts from the priority management activities that improve forest health and resilience. The Roadless Rule restricts new road construction on approximately 58 of the 193 million acres of National Forest lands. Most of the acres in roadless areas are steep, remote, and costly to access for timber harvest. Historically, roads were built where it was most economically viable to harvest and haul timber. This remains true today, and the distance from un-roaded lands to active mills is even further today due to the large number of mill closures over the last 30 years. Rescinding the Roadless Rule won't mitigate wildfire risk, which is based on three factors: the likelihood that a wildfire will happen in a given place, the potential severity of a fire when it occurs, and the values at risk. The highest

priority for reducing wildfire risk is in the wildland-urban interface where people, property, and infrastructure are exposed.

In conclusion, after decades of intensive use followed by prolonged inaction, our forests face unprecedented stress from wildfire, insects, and disease and drought. We must implement proactive management at a meaningful scale, informed by robust science, and supported by a prepared workforce and regional infrastructure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

[The prepared statement of Dr. DeLuca follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS H., DELUCA, PH.D., DEAN, COLLEGE OF FORESTRY, OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY; DIRECTOR, OREGON FOREST RESEARCH LABORATORY, OSU, CORVALLIS, OR

Chairman LaMalfa, Vice Chair Moore, Ranking Member Salinas, Vice Ranking Member Riley, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the role of active management in promoting forest health, including wildfire resilience, and on the potential for National Forestlands to contribute to additional domestic timber production. My name is Thomas DeLuca; I serve as Dean of the College of Forestry at Oregon State University (OSU).

The U.S. Forest Service stewards approximately 193 million acres of National Forest System lands. Following direction from Executive Order 14225, Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production (signed March 1, 2025), USDA Secretary Rollins issued a memo¹ designating 112 million acres—approximately 60% of the system—as an “emergency situation” to expedite active management and timber production.

I fully agree with the position that the pace and scale of active management on these lands must increase. Our federally managed forestlands look much different today than they would have when European settlers first arrived. Much of today’s National Forests, with the exception of lands that have been under long-term protection (such as National Parks and designated Wilderness areas) have been harvested, densely planted and managed primarily for timber production for decades. However, major reductions in active management starting in the 1980s, combined with deferred maintenance of roads and firebreaks as well as the exclusion of fire and of Indigenous stewardship on these landscapes, have resulted in many forests being dangerously overstocked, vulnerable to insects and disease, and at risk of high-intensity wildfires. Active, science-informed management is essential for restoring resilience and productivity to these forests.

I applaud meaningful policy and actions that can accelerate and increase science-informed management, but we face a key challenge I respectfully encourage this Committee to further consider: Can the Federal Government effectively achieve the active management outcomes needed on the collective of Federal forestlands while simultaneously implementing proposed USDA plans to reduce the workforce and research capacity needed to support this work?

There is a clear and present opportunity to increase timber production on previously managed forestlands and in the process restore forest health and fire resiliency. To restore forest health, reduce wildfire risk, and support a sustainable domestic timber supply, the strategy must be grounded in science and paired with investments in workforce, local capacity, and partnerships. The Forest Service cannot deliver science-based, regionally tailored management without people and resources to plan, implement, and monitor projects at scale. With this in mind, I share three key points for your consideration.

1. Federal Reductions in Force and Restructuring Proposals Undermine Ability To Ramp Up Localized Active Management

Secretary Rollins issued a memorandum² on July 24 to propose reorganization plans for the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service. This proposal outlined key goals, including streamlining agency processes, removing barriers to success, and enhancing the ability of Federal employees to interface with their constituents. The USDA reorganization plan to centralize personnel and resources in regional hubs may offer administrative efficiencies; however, this action risks undermining the foundation of effective natural resource management by losing local

¹ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-006.pdf>.

² <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/07/24/secretary-rollins-announces-usda-reorganization-restoring-departments-core-mission-supporting>.

knowledge and partnerships, trust, and ecological specificity that are critical to natural resource management.

Workforce reductions are already constraining Federal capacity. Although the total number of staff departures is difficult to determine, a July *Reuters* investigation reported that as many as 5,000 USFS employees—or 15% of the workforce—left the agency in the last 5 months.³ This is a rapid and destabilizing loss for the agency that is now tasked with ramping up management efforts across the nation’s forests.

The cuts that have occurred across Federal agencies supporting forestry and natural resource management have disproportionately fallen on early-career staff, often during probationary periods, as well as veteran employees with legacy knowledge nearing retirement. The reduction in both cohorts simultaneously creates not only a significant gap in knowledge transfer within the agencies, but a missed opportunity to onboard young professionals trained in the latest science and management approaches.

Likewise, for forestry and natural resources graduates entering the workforce, the opportunities to contribute the latest scientific knowledge and best practice to the field are dwindling, despite the need for their expertise increasing. Anecdotally, in Oregon State University’s job posting system for students, the USDA Forest Service posted more than 270 full-time, seasonal, and internship opportunities for OSU students during the 2023–24 academic year. For the 2024–25 academic year, the agency posted only 13. The impact of the loss of these internship opportunities is still being assessed, but at a minimum they represent a significant loss in opportunities for students in forestry and the natural resources.

The USDA reorganization proposal also includes moving from regionally located scientists and local field managers in favor of a centralized USFS research and development office in Fort Collins, Colorado. While this may be administratively efficient, it risks ignoring the ecological complexity of distinct forest types across the country. Co-location of regional offices where forest management activities take place fosters collaboration, accelerates innovation, and supports the training of the next generation of scientists and land managers. These partnerships are often rooted in shared landscapes and mutual investment in local outcomes—something that is difficult to replicate from a distant hub.

2. USFS Research Enterprise Reductions Hinder Science-Informed Management Practices To Support Forest Health and Productivity

Second, and closely related to overall USFS workforce reductions in regional field staff, are the implications for the U.S. Forest Service Research Enterprise. Colleagues at the USFS report that headcount in the agency’s research and development arm has dropped 25 percent—nearly 400 permanent employees—since 2024. At the Pacific Northwest Research Station specifically, which is co-located at Oregon State University’s Corvallis campus, staff declined by 60 positions, or 24 percent, over the same period. Although Congress has allocated funds for additional R&D staff, hiring freezes prevent the agency from filling these critical roles.

The USFS research enterprise plays a critical role in advancing American forestry. Its synergy with universities ensures that science is regionally focused, grounded in local eco-regions, and responsive to the needs of forest-dependent communities. The proposal to further reduce headcounts and centralize USFS staff in Fort Collins, Colorado, risks further weakening the ties that sustain joint research, student mentorship, and rapid knowledge exchange between the agency and universities such as Oregon State University on a local and regional scale.

We cannot manage today’s forests without science-based practices that are continuously updated based on ever-evolving threats to our forests, including increasingly hot, dry conditions, novel insects and pathogens, and exotic plants to name a few. For decades, many Federal forestlands were intensively managed, followed by decades of minimal management. The resulting landscapes are primed for disease, insect outbreaks, drought stress, and catastrophic wildfire.

Rather than creating efficiencies or improving the ability to readily adapt to changing conditions, centralization would raise costs and reduce opportunities for field-based science—science that is essential to effective forest management, timber production, wildfire risk reduction, and long-term forest health. Research conducted by OSU and the USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station, for instance, demonstrates that carefully applied thinning and the reintroduction of prescribed fire can restore resiliency to these forests. Innovations in wildfire risk reduction, wood

³ <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/us-wildfires-rage-trump-staff-cuts-force-fire-fighters-clean-toilets-critics-say-2025-07-21/>.

utilization, and forest management technologies continue to grow through such collaborative partnerships.

Equally important is the role of the USFS experimental forest network. Long-term ecological data collection at sites such as the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest have provided irreplaceable insights into how forests function for more than 75 years. The H.J. Andrews leverages approximately three times the money invested by the USFS, including from OSU, to support this work. No other government agency or industry outside of the USFS is positioned or has the incentives to support the scientific work currently advanced by USFS and the associated knowledge generation that supports forestry on both public and private lands. Interruptions to these datasets would represent permanent losses to our collective understanding of forest ecosystems.

Centralization would also reduce opportunities for the local collaborations that make science actionable—partnerships with Tribes, state agencies, industry, and communities—as well as limit training opportunities for graduate students and the next generation of forest stewards. While virtual tools can help, they cannot replace the value of shared landscapes and on-the-ground collaboration. Over time, this shift would narrow perspective, slow innovation, and weaken the scientific foundation for National Forest policy.

It is also essential to recognize that forest management challenges differ greatly by region. The nation’s strongest concentrations of forestry capacity are in the Pacific Northwest and the Southeast. Centralizing USFS R&D in a single hub ignores this reality and risks one-size-fits-all solutions that fail to account for ecological diversity and regional economies.

Finally, not all forest management is fuels management. Practices must be grounded in science and legal frameworks to balance ecological, economic, and social goals. Federal and state governments, Tribes, universities, communities, nonprofits, and industry all offer tools, knowledge, and partnerships to adopt more active and sustainable forest management. But this requires that the USFS research enterprise remain robust, well-resourced, and regionally engaged. Without that, our ability to expand active management at scale—and do it responsibly—will be compromised.

3. Rescinding the Roadless Rule Distracts from Priority Management Activities that Improve Forest Health and Resilience

There is a large body of research to strongly support the urgent need to expand active management to restore forest health and reduce wildfire risk, and I again applaud efforts to accelerate this work. But using wildfire mitigation as the justification to rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule is a distraction from where treatments are most urgently needed.

The Roadless Rule restricts new road construction on approximately 58 million acres of the 193 million acres of National Forest lands. Removal of protections in these roadless areas has been proposed with the goal, as stated by Secretary Rollins in an Aug. 27 press release,⁴ to “properly manage our Federal lands to create healthy, resilient, and productive forests for generations to come,” with a particular concern for wildfire mitigation and timber production.

Rescinding the Roadless Rule risks diverting resources away from urgent priorities, which include restoring resilience where people, homes, communities, economies, and ecosystems are most vulnerable.

While there may be some benefit to both wildfire mitigation and timber supply by accessing roadless areas, the costs far outweigh the benefits from both an environmental and economic perspective. Most of these acres are steep, remote, and costly to access for timber harvest. Historically, roads were built where it was economically viable to harvest and haul timber and areas left without roads were often too costly or impractical to develop. This remains true today. And, if anything, the distance from un-roaded lands to active mills is further today due to the large number of mill closures over the last 30 years.

Rescinding the rule also won’t significantly mitigate wildfire risk. Wildfire risk is based on three factors: the likelihood that a wildfire will happen in a specific place, the potential intensity of a fire when it does happen, and the values at risk. The highest priority for reducing wildfire risk is the wildland-urban interface, where people, property, and infrastructure are most exposed. Fuels treatments near communities, watersheds, and critical habitats provide the greatest benefit. By contrast,

⁴ <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/08/27/secretary-rollins-opens-next-step-roadless-rule-rescission>.

dedicating scarce resources to build roads into steep backcountry for timber and fire suppression diverts attention from where it matters most (Downing, *et al.* 2022).⁵

This is supported by scientific research indicating that wilderness and inventoried roadless areas experience fewer ignitions than roaded “front-country” areas, where human-caused fires dominate. According to a recent study, 84% of ignitions nationally are human-caused, and they overwhelmingly occur where roads already exist (Balch, *et al.* 2017).⁶ While roads can improve suppression access, they also increase ignition risk, facilitate invasive species spread, and fragment habitat. (Johnston, *et al.* 2021).⁷

Conclusion

The health and resilience of our nation’s forests depend on active, science-informed management. After decades of both intensive use and prolonged inaction, our forests face unprecedented stress from wildfire, insects, disease, and drought. To mitigate, we must implement proactive management at a meaningful scale.

The need to increase pace and scale has been acknowledged across multiple Administrations, on both sides of the aisle, and I commend this Administration for prioritizing the health and resiliency of Federal forestlands. If policy directives alone could achieve this, however, it would have been done by now. Real progress demands investment in the people, science, and infrastructure that make management possible. That means sustaining a skilled Federal workforce, supporting the U.S. Forest Service research enterprise and enabling collaboration with research institutions and other partners. It also means ensuring sufficient regional milling capacity and innovative wood products like cross-laminated timber (“CLT”), other mass timber components, and composites to process and use material removed through restoration and fuels reduction treatments. Without these, even the best policy goals cannot be met.

I also want to recognize and commend the Administration for advancing programs like the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership. One of the recently funded projects—the Oregon-Hood River Wildfire & Watershed Project,⁸ in which Oregon State University’s Extension Fire Program is a partner—is a model for how Federal investment can align with local expertise to achieve real results. By bringing agencies, research institutions, and communities together, this project will reduce wildfire risk, protect watersheds, and strengthen community resilience. This is exactly the kind of science-based, collaborative work we should be expanding nationwide.

By contrast, cuts to staffing, proposed consolidation of regional offices and research efforts, and distractions such as revisiting the Roadless Rule will not help us reach these goals. They will hinder progress at the very moment we need to accelerate it. We should be focusing instead on scaling treatments in priority landscapes, expanding partnerships with Tribes, states, and communities, and building on the innovations that universities and the Forest Service have already developed together.

If we are serious about restoring forest health, reducing wildfire risk, and supporting rural economies, we must invest in capacity—this includes people, businesses, and resilient communities—not reduce it. By pairing active management with robust science, a prepared workforce, and regional infrastructure, we can truly help “properly manage our Federal lands to create healthy, resilient, and productive forests for generations to come,” as Secretary Rollins and the Administration have stated.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. DeLuca. We will now go to Member questions, and I will recognize first, Ranking Member Salinas.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you Chairman LaMalfa. So, let’s just dive right in. Dr. DeLuca, your testimony gave us some valuable insight and overview of the importance and impacts of partnerships between universities, like Oregon State and the Forest Service, in advancing research and skilled workforce development. Can you share and dive in a little deeper on some examples of research and/or projects of the College of Forestry that you might be working on

⁵ https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs_journals/2022/rmrs_2022_downing_w001.pdf.

⁶ https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public_lands/pdfs/BalchPNAS-2017.pdf.

⁷ <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/14/13/133001/pdf>.

⁸ <https://www.nres.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/joint-chiefs-landscape-restoration-partnership/summary-of-fy25-selected-joint>.

with the Forest Service right now, and how do these projects help inform Federal land management?

Dr. DELUCA. Yes. We work directly with the Forest Service on innumerable projects. Some that are particularly of relevance to this Committee would be on the Wildfire and Water Security Research Project, which deals with looking at the effect of wildfire on municipal drinking water quality and availability. And that work was a joint project between U.S. Forest Service and several universities, including Oregon State University. That project was actually rescinded just recently, but it is an example of the type of work we are doing together.

We also have the extensive work on the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest. It is the longest-standing, long-term ecological research site in the nation, and it is a collaboration between U.S. Forest Service and Oregon State University, and in that site, it has burned three times in the last 4 years. We have had fires on that site three times in the last 4 years, which opens up incredible opportunities for studying wildfire recovery and restoration, and those are projects that are being initiated on the forests today. I would go on, but I want to be—I recognize time limitations.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, and I would imagine that the information and the research that you are gathering actually helps inform policies then on the ground and for the Federal Government to figure out which direction to take and be most efficient and less wasteful.

Dr. DELUCA. Yes, absolutely. I think research is exceptionally important and having science-informed policy, policy that incorporates unbiased information, that is built out of not just individual studies, but a *corpus* of data that is collected over tens of years. And especially in a field such as forestry, that long-term science is exceptionally important, and that is where programs, such as the Experimental Forest Network within the U.S. Forest Service, is so important because it provides that continual data collection over the lifecycle of forests and rotations.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. The Trump Administration has cited improving fire prevention efforts as a justification for rescinding the 2001 Roadless Rule, claiming that the decision will reduce the risk of wildfire—I mentioned this in my opening statement—but research also shows that human activity is the leading cause of fire. In fact, according to the Forest Service's own data, humans cause upwards of 85 percent of wildfire fires. Further, a study from the Wilderness Society found that fire ignition density rates are highest within 50 meters of roads. So, again to Dr. DeLuca, what does the scientific literature say about roadless area and fire risk, and do you see rescission of the Roadless Rule as a meaningful step toward improving our fire preparedness and response?

Dr. DELUCA. Yes. We know that in areas where humans are present, we have more fire ignitions. We also, of course, have lightning fire ignitions or natural ignitions, but humans greatly increase the number of ignitions that occur on the landscape. So, once you build roads into areas, you increase access and you increase the potential ignitions. Whether those fires erupt into full-scale wildfires is dependent on whether there are conditions that are conducive to that fire erupting. However, the roadless area and

the existing designated wilderness areas are areas that were not managed heavily in the past because of the lack of roading and have the lower densities, stand densities, than those areas that were managed and then not managed. Those areas, you open the stand up, and you have higher density. And so, following—especially with the combination of no management combined with active fire suppression increases the severity of fires that occur in that area. And, of course, those areas are closer to where communities exist, and that is where the effort to reduce fuels should be prioritized at this stage.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. My time has expired. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Salinas. I will now recognize our Chairman of the full Committee, Mr. Thompson from Pennsylvania.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. Thanks again for the witnesses for being here. In many forests, including my National Forest, Allegheny National Forest, which I represent, we have significant challenges with invasive species. Ms. Barnes, can you speak to the role that state forestry agencies play with combating these invasives that undermine forest health?

Ms. BARNES. Yes. So, invasive species is something we take very seriously, and trying to combat those and eradicate those on the landscape is something that should be done. These can add fuel to the fire and growth to fires and actually lead to catastrophic wildfires in the communities, so working to control those, to eradicate those. In our fuels program, we work to provide projects that can help to reduce those and restore native vegetation in the landscape, which is a very, very important component to reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Mr. THOMPSON. Yes, and I really appreciate the role the partnership between USDA and our state agencies. That teamwork really does make a difference for us. In Pennsylvania, we don't have massive wildfires, but we have small ones, pretty easily managed, but it is the invasives that do the damage in the Allegheny National Forest.

Ms. Barnes, in your testimony, you mentioned support for the so-called *Cottonwood* fix, which was included in the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024, and due to the *Cottonwood* decision 2015, the Forest Service is required to re-initiate consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service on completed forest plans when a new species is listed under the Endangered Species Act, or new information is brought forward. Now, Forest Service Chiefs, both under Republican and Democratic Administrations, have said that further consultation isn't necessary as it would require more than 100 forest plans to be revised, costing taxpayer dollars and agency staff time but with no real benefits. A partial fix was provided by Congress in 2018 but expired in 2023. Do you have any further comment on *Cottonwood* and why we need to fix it once and for all?

Ms. BARNES. Yes. I would just say that this is an important thing to look at. I think fixing this would be helpful, also looking at the forest action plans and how they address that. This is an avenue that is a strategic plan for the forests, but paying special attention on how we can streamline matters, how we can make permanent fixes for something is something that we are always looking for,

and ways to get things done in a more streamlined and better process.

Mr. THOMPSON. Very good, and then just one final question. In 2014, I had the privilege of chairing the Conservation, Energy, and Forestry Subcommittee that included some other jurisdictions and then—and then the bill in 2018 all provided some categorical exemptions, some tools to the U.S. Forest Service. So, I will open this up to the whole panel: is there anything that comes to mind of new tools that we need to equip the U.S. Forest Service with so they can do their job of managing the forest in a healthy way? And I measure health environmentally by the health of the forest through active management, tempering, replanting to the environment, and, quite frankly, through the economies for the municipalities that we are struggling right now to get Secure Rural Schools reauthorized, which is a crime. I mean, I understand out West, there are schools that have closed because the Secure Rural Schools has expired, and as hard as this Committee has worked, we have had a difficult time getting the rest of Congress to reauthorize that. And so, are there any tools that come to mind that you think that we certainly should consider within the remaining portion of the Farm Bill 2.0?

Dr. MONOHAN. I would be happy to respond to that, Chairman Thompson.

Mr. THOMPSON. Please, and thank you for the visit.

Dr. MONOHAN. Heck yes.

Mr. THOMPSON. Yes, hosting—our great Chairman and I, we had a great visit to your headquarters there. Very impressive.

Dr. MONOHAN. We are very honored to have you come visit us. My testimony today is speaking about a process, an agreement type that is already in place that would allow much of what you are talking about to continue to go forward. And the challenge that we have with that agreement type is that our Forest Service partners aren't familiar enough to feel comfortable using it when it is new to them, so one of the opportunities we have is to work with them on training so that they can use a Service First agreement. The Service First would not necessarily allow harvest. It is basic forestry practices, right, to allow for fuels reduction, prescribed fire, but we would need other tools to do more sustainable harvesting, and that could be the Good Neighbor Agreement, and, again, that is new to them, this new version of it, and that is what takes time.

Mr. THOMPSON. Yes, and my time has expired, but I would encourage our witnesses, anything you can put in writing and forward to our Chairman and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee. It is time to get 2.0 done, and I want to make sure, just like in 2014 and 2018, we have a robust forestry title in what will be the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2025. So, thanks so much. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that. Good work, Mr. Chairman, and it doesn't always meet the eye for people that a lot of great forestry work is getting done in our farm bills, so thank you, sir. Now, with that, will recognize my colleague from California, Mr. Costa.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman of the Subcommittee and the Chairman of the full Committee, for holding this hearing. The purpose, of course, is promoting forest health and

resiliency through improved active management. Frankly, I think that we need to examine the whole effort that is going forth between the United States Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service—U.S. Forest Service agency in terms of this change that—of rearranging priorities and the management for the Forest Service. Frankly, I am puzzled, and I think I have suggested to the Chairman that we need to have greater oversight in this reorganization act because I don't think it is clear how—ultimately, what the goals are going to be and how it is going to impact the mission, in this case, of the U.S. Forest Service.

I have been here for 21 years, and I think through Administrations of both parties, there has been a lack of focus and emphasis on the two areas that we are talking about here today: forest management and the efforts to provide support for fire suppression. And what we have done is we have had a series of circumstances in which we appropriate money for forest management, but the fire season, as the Chairman noted in his opening statement, is no longer a season, but it is year round throughout the West. And we run out of money to deal with the fire suppression, we borrow that money from forest management, and we don't do a very good job in either, in my view.

Let me, to the point, talk about an effort that took place by a number of us a few years ago to provide a 10 year wildfire crisis strategy, which invested \$1.4 billion to deal with forest management, and, Dr. Monohan, I didn't get a chance to see you last night, but I am glad you are here because I would like you to comment on this. It deals with ten high-risk landscapes in eight western states. It was a tragedy, what occurred in Chairman LaMalfa's district in Paradise, as we all noted. We had the Creek Fire in my area some few years ago that lasted 2½ months and burned over 400,000 acres of forests. Right now as I speak, we have the Garnet Fire. In 2 weeks, it has consumed over 60,000 acres, and it is 15 percent contained. I am wondering exactly what we are doing, and they—the Forest Service—the USDA has removed from their website this effort on the Inflation Reduction Act (Pub. L. 117-169) on \$1.4 billion to manage these ten high-risk areas. I don't understand why they are doing that, why we are depleting resources from the Forest Service that needs it now at this critical time with climate change and other factors that we are dealing with.

Dr. Monohan, would you please comment on where we are putting our resources and the reduction of people that need to be there, who have the expertise and the experience to combat the challenges with this fire season?

Dr. MONOHAN. Thank you. I think you put—you are right on it, Congressman Costa. We have separated fire from forestry. Fire is an important part of forestry and can actually be good fire to help manage our forests and keep it so that catastrophic wildfire doesn't destroy them. Because we have literally separated those funding streams at the very, very top, we currently have a forest management system that responds to catastrophic fire after the fact.

Mr. COSTA. And it makes no sense. I mean, it is inconsistent.

Dr. MONOHAN. Correct. We need long-term sustainable funding for ongoing forest management that really has nothing to do with harvesting huge amounts of trees. These forests require constant

work and maintenance, and prescribed fire needs to be a part of that, right, as does other types of fuels reductions so we can get to it.

Mr. COSTA. Absolutely. We have lost over 20 percent of the giant sequoia trees since 2015, and right now, this Garnet Fire is threading another sequoia grove. I wrote a letter yesterday, many of my California colleagues supported it, to the Secretary of Agriculture to put a potential focus right now. They are using Chinook helicopters for night flying, which is good, but we need to provide other resources so that we don't have a repeat of what occurred during the Creek Fire some 3 years ago.

Dr. MONOHAN. I agree completely with you. I am very sad to see what is happening to the sequoias right now, and, really, this about getting ahead of the next catastrophic wildfire already.

Mr. COSTA. Yes. My time is expiring here, Mr. Chairman, but I think Mr. Dane talked about the closure of 130 mills to provide a logging resource. And there is a lot of complexity that is involved in our supply chain that I think we need to really examine when we look at supply of wood materials from not only Canada, but from Brazil, and how we keep our supply chain focused in a way that makes sense for all the multiple uses that we use for wood products. And I know that we don't have time here, but there are a lot of facets to this important Subcommittee hearing. I commend you for doing that. I would like to say one other thing. I would like to invite the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the representative from the Forest Service to testify before the Committee as to what this reorganization means and what their end game is.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Costa. That is certainly, our intention is, in further hearings, to have them in and get a handle on where we are right now because this Committee wants to be more active on that work, so I thank you. And to your other point, too, we need to have longer-term commitments from Forest Service supplies so that we can have the milling capacity, have the confidence they are going to be able to have a return on investment should they invest in more milling capacity. That would be huge. So, and last you mentioned some of the tragedy in our district. I am sorry you got a big fire going on in yours. This is—actually I was presented with two gavels, one for the Carr Fire in northern California and one for the Camp Fire. This is not an oversized gavel. I have just shrunk a little bit.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. So, with that—

Mr. COSTA. Well, the tragedy of our fires in the state and the West is something that I think we all share.

The CHAIRMAN. Big time, sir, yes, and our colleague in Oregon as well, we are dealing with that. So, let me recognize Mr. Baird for his opportunity, 5 minutes. Thank you.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ranking Member, for holding this hearing, and then I always appreciate the witnesses making the effort to be here to give us your insight into whatever industry we are talking about. And, I got a brother that is involved in the forestry business or in the industry, and in Indiana, we have a lot of hardwoods, both red and white oak, cherry, walnut. And since we are talking about forestry management, the

last thing I knew out of Indiana that through forest management, we end up having more growth than we do in the harvest, and so the timber is continuing to grow more than we are harvesting. And the other thing that I think we need to keep—and this just a comment, but timber, plus the wood industry, plus the furniture business, really provides us a long-term carbon sequestration, carbon storage. So, I think we ought to give the forest industry credit for doing that, but I better get back on course here, Mr. Chairman.

So, Scott, you laid out the serious decline in forest health and the urgent need to reduce hazardous fuels through active management. As Congress works to pass a farm bill this year, what provisions do you believe are the most critical to include now so we don't lose more time in tackling the wildfire crisis and supporting the logging industry? And I know you have probably addressed that in some of your other comments, but I will give you an opportunity to review that.

Mr. DANE. Mr. Chairman, Congressman, thank you very much. When it comes to reducing hazardous fuels, the obstacle there is what do you do with the low-value/no-value hazardous fuels, small-diameter unmerchantable timber, and we are really limited on what we can do because of the lack of infrastructure to utilize that. And we find that the only viable markets right now for that are biomass power generation, and they have been cut out of the tax credits that they have been a part of for many, many years, and so that jeopardizes those existing markets. Now, if we can develop new markets, such as sustainable aviation fuel from forest-based feedstock, to utilize that, that is great, but we are not there yet. So, we need to support the biomass power sector as the only viable option for utilization of hazardous fuels in many cases.

As an example, when the Inflation Reduction Act passed and there was money for hazardous fuel reduction in there, I spoke to the White House and I said, "That is terrific, but what are you going to do with the biomass once we collect it?" And they said, "What do you mean?" I said, "We have such a limited infrastructure to utilize that, that we don't really have the ability to transport it 100 miles or more under the current cost structure." So, they said, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "We are going to push it up in a pile, and we are going to light it on fire and open burn." So, that is an example of why we need to have the markets to support the utilization of hazardous fuels.

Mr. BAIRD. I can't resist asking—when you talk about the biomass, I can't resist asking this question about biochar, if there are any comments you care to make on that in that regard.

Mr. DANE. Yes, there are quite a few developments in the biochar sector. In fact, I was meeting this week with a couple of representatives that have biomass power plants, and they are going to site biochar facilities on their biomass power plant sites as well. So, it is a new product, but it has a lot of potential, and forest-based feedstock would be the primary feedstock for developing biochar.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, and we got about 1 minute left for me. So, any of the other three of you have any thoughts in that arena?

Dr. DELUCA. Well, just really briefly, following up on the biochar issue, one of the key things that has to happen for biochar to be successful as a product is to demonstrate its value. It isn't like ap-

plying a fertilizer. It doesn't yield at a direct yield response that you know what you are going to get out of it in a given year. And so, there are studies that need to be conducted to demonstrate its long-term value as a soil amendment because right now, there just isn't a market for biochar. So, the break-even haul distances to get the stuff to a place where you can convert it as an energy source is a problem, but if we can have that value add of biochar, it would make a big difference.

Mr. BAIRD. But it is almost pure carbon, and so it would really contribute to soil health.

Dr. DeLUCA. Yes. Yep.

Mr. BAIRD. Do I have an opportunity to ask one more question or—

The CHAIRMAN. Go fast, and we will let you.

Mr. BAIRD. Real fast. Anyone else?

Dr. MONOHAN. I would love to chime in about the biochar conversation. In our watersheds, we experienced the California Gold Rush 150 years ago, and we have mine-impacted acres from hydraulic mining. This is denuded areas with no topsoil. These areas are excellent for biochar amendments, and we have done some—both lab tests and field studies with Pacific Southwest Research Station partners to look at biochar and its benefits of putting that carbon sequestration benefits included on that hydraulic mine-impacted landscape, and we would really like to continue to pursue that. In fact, I mentioned that Forest Service sometimes are so limited in their capacity, that even though we brought funded grants to them to continue this work, they had a hard time accepting and going forward with it because they were at max.

Mr. BAIRD. We better end there, and I thank you and appreciate your responses, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you, Mr. Baird, and, Dr. Monohan, I was just noting you said 150. Actually, yesterday was California's 175th birthday, so happy birthday, home state. Yes, time flies, doesn't it?

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. It is also my mother-in-law's birthday that day. I won't say what that number is.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. So, anyway, Mr. Riley from New York.

Mr. RILEY. Thanks. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I was just about to jump in and bail you out, but you saved yourself there with—

[Laughter.]

Mr. RILEY. So, where I am from in upstate New York, we know a thing or two about bad trade deals, lost a lot of jobs over the last generation because of them, and I think that what we are seeing right now with our current situation with the logging industry is really, really bad. Mr. Dane, in your testimony, you talked a bit about this. I saw you submitted the *Roadmap to Recovery*, and in it, you identified a bunch of top priorities for your Council, and one of those was fixing our trade system. It is also a top priority for my constituents. I have one for—just as one example.

I have a constituent in Green County, whose family business employs dozens of our neighbors. They have become a real, real leader in sustainability in the community, and their business is mostly do-

mestic, but, historically, they have depended on access to foreign markets to stay afloat. And speaking of staying afloat, she has literally had logs floating in the ocean since March when China retaliated against Trump's tariffs regime, and she has lost access to these markets, which is inflicting a ton of damage on her small family business. And you meet these folks, they are people who are working their tails off, they are doing everything that has been asked of them, and all of a sudden, they have the rug ripped out from underneath them, and it is just simply not fair to put that family and that family business in that situation.

And so, my office, we have been pressing USDA and USTR to make this right for that small family business and their dozens of employees, but I am pretty frustrated because I don't think anybody is treating this with the urgency that it demands. Around this place in Washington, it is bureaucracy and red tape and nonsense. Back home, these are real jobs for real people in a real community doing real work, and it is really important. And your testimony said that there are 150 mills that have closed in just the last 36 months, and that is just not an acceptable trajectory for us. And so, my question for you is, generally, for my constituent, any thoughts that you have for them, any thoughts that you have for us and for this Committee to make sure that folks in that situation aren't having so much damage inflicted on them because of the current trade situation that we are in.

Mr. DANE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Congressman. I am glad you brought that up. The trade policy that we are talking about is extremely complex, and there—it is—it is far more than the softwood lumber which gets all the attention. I have been in touch with your constituents up in New York, and we have made it very clear that we support the softwood lumber tariffs and duties. However, we do not support the impacts to hardwood exports, the point being is these markets are limited in the United States. Most of the people up near your district are sourcing or marketing domestically about 50 percent of their hardwood, but there is no other market left beyond that capacity, so the China market was extremely important. And until we get more domestic markets established in the United States, the American Loggers Council supports the export of hardwood logs to China, and we have made that clear to the Administration in our discussions with them as well.

Mr. RILEY. Well, I appreciate that very much, and I think what you described is, as I understand it, with my constituent's business, exactly the case. They have a significant, even a majority domestic market, but that market can't absorb everything, and so they have depended on access to foreign markets. I think all of it goes to the point that a smart, strategic, targeted trade policy in this country needs to make sure that Americans are operating on a level playing field, and it needs to be thoughtful instead of just throwing a bunch of stuff against the wall and seeing what sticks. And we are seeing, if we had a thoughtful strategic trade policy, this business would be thriving, would be continuing to thrive, and so I appreciate the nuance that you are thinking about this. And, Mr. Chairman, with that, I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you, Mr. Riley. I will recognize Mr. Wied from Wisconsin.

Mr. WIED. Well, thank you, Chairman LaMalfa and Ranking Member Salinas, for this hearing today.

Wisconsin has a strong heritage with the forest products industry, employing over 57,000 people and contributing nearly \$27 billion to our state economy. The industry ranks second in economic output for our state. Wisconsin has been a leader in the lumber industry for nearly 200 years, and I am proud that my home county, Brown County, is the leader for the state in terms of jobs and output. Without proper management of our forests, the rest of this incredibly important industry for Wisconsin's 8th District would cease to exist. As far as forest management, I am proud to represent the Menominee Nation, who are frequently recognized as managing one of the most sustainable forests in the world. I am proud to serve on this Subcommittee for this reason and have enjoyed being able to learn more about the state of American forestry and how we as Congress can do a better job.

So, as I got to Congress, I immediately recognized the importance of Wisconsin's timber and paper industry and, specifically, maintaining and improving the safety and efficiency of it. Even though it is a transportation- and infrastructure-referred bill, I wanted to reference how proud I was to introduce the bipartisan Safe Routes Act of 2025 (H.R. 2166) to promote exactly this by opening up more short-distance routes for loggers. Mr. Dane, and I will open this up to anyone here, what are some more creative ways we could promote safety and efficiency for loggers?

Mr. DANE. Mr. Chairman, Congressman, it is nice to meet you. I have heard a lot about you from Henry Simbeck who was here yesterday with me doing some work.

Mr. WIED. Yes.

Mr. DANE. A couple of things to think about. You referenced the Menominee Tribe, and they are known nationally as one of the most productive forest programs in the country. And when I talked to them, they told me that their chief with their forestland said you start at one end and you log across, selectively, you practice forest management until you get to the other end, and then you turn around and you start over again. They recognize sustainable forestry and practice that as well as other Tribes, I am sure, across the country. Now, when it comes to safer routes, I really appreciate that. That is an important issue. We have no consistency in the United States for efficient transportation.

Mr. WIED. Yes.

Mr. DANE. We have states that can run 99,000 pounds, that can run 100,000 thousand pounds year round, different axle configurations, and they are forcing these logging trucks to avoid the interstate—that is what we are talking about, the interstate here—and use county and state roads.

Mr. WIED. Right.

Mr. DANE. In Minnesota, we used to have to run down a cobblestone road in Duluth, Minnesota, parallel to an interstate system. Now, we did get the law changed and allowed us to go around Duluth, Minnesota and use the interstate for a 23 mile corridor.

Mr. WIED. Yes.

Mr. DANE. That would be one step. Another thing for the farm bill would be the future careers in logging. Workforce development

is critical issue. The timber industry is based on small, multigenerational family businesses. These are not large corporations. These are family businesses.

Mr. WIED. Yes.

Mr. DANE. And they just want to train their family members coming up, just like farmers can do right now, when their children are 16 and 17 years old to operate mechanized equipment. Logging is mechanized today. There is still hand filling, but the majority of it is mechanized. We just want that same opportunity to train the next generation coming up. The Secure Our Rural Schools that was mentioned here, for the first time it is not funded, and it is going to be catastrophic.

Mr. WIED. Yes.

Mr. DANE. This was designed to replace funding that was lost by the reduction of Federal timber harvesting receipts to keep these communities that are forestry dependent whole, and so Secure Our Rural Schools is important. And then Loggers Economic Assistance and Relief Act (H.R. 4665) was recently introduced by Congressman Golden, and it is cosponsored by Congressman Pete Stauber from Minnesota. We need to have some safety nets in place for these industries when markets are closing and stuff. And then, of course, the biomass power under the renewable fuel standard and the tax credits would go a long way as well, sir.

Mr. WIED. Great. Well, thank you. Anyone else? We have about 30 seconds.

Ms. BARNES. Mr. Chairman, if I may, in Utah, piggybacking off what he said, partnering with the colleges for rural education in our communities is something we focused on big. The forestry industry is somewhat depleted in our areas, so making sure that we can build that trade still in our rural communities is something that is very important. I would also say, in Utah, we have a different type of timber market, so not quite the same of what you are talking about, but also economic development is important in our communities, and also money from economic development, whether it is at the state or the local or even the Federal level, but to help these businesses get started up. And then also, long-term timber contracts that they can rely on in order to start producing, and get credit, and start up these businesses has been really important in Utah. Utah lost two of our mills recently to fires, and so trying to get those mills back online and getting them to be in a profitable manner has been really difficult with our market.

Mr. WIED. Yes. Great. All right. Well, thank you for being here, and with that I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Wied. For those Members or staff that are monitoring our Committee on TV, *et cetera*, we are getting down to the last couple questions here. So, if they are on the sidelines or straddling other committees, I would encourage them to come to our Subcommittee if they wish. So, anyway, I will recognize myself for a little bit for questions of our panel. Again, thank you all for being here, and I will start with Mr. Dane.

You stated a bit earlier that the timber harvest in our forest system has declined by about 75 percent—I think this is from about the mid-1990s or so—from a high of about 13 billion board-feet to right around 3 billion board-feet right now, so, and even that num-

ber, 3 billion, is below what was actually authorized under current forest plans across the country. So, talk to me about that inventory. What does that mean as far as the number of board-feet we are growing each year *versus* the number of board-feet we are taking out?

Mr. DANE. Yes. The harvest volume is 25 percent of the growth volume on National Forests, so that—

The CHAIRMAN. So, juxtapose that with overcrowded trees and landscapes, and things like that. So, if we are going to be removing product at 25 percent of the growth, 3 to 1—1 to 3—how is that going to be successful long-term on thinning forests and getting back to a balance of fire safety and not overdraft of the—what is water supply. And it might be, we see when we have arid areas that go through drought, it exacerbates it. So, touch on that more specifically, please.

Mr. DANE. The USDA's announcement that they want to increase—in the President's announcement, they want to increase timber harvest by 25 percent, that would take us from 3 billion board-feet to 4 million board-feet, roughly speaking—4 billion board-feet. Excuse me.

The CHAIRMAN. So, in one sense, 25 percent sounds like a lot. On the other hand, if we are keeping up with just a mere fraction of what is growing out there, then that hardly even touches the issue level we should be. Do you agree with that or—

Mr. DANE. I agree with that, and you are correct, and the emphasis needs to really be placed on the western states. People look at Minnesota as an example where the Federal forests represent 11 percent of the forestland, and they only contribute four percent of the harvested volume. Now, that is—11 percent, four percent, that is a small amount. When you are out West, you are looking at 50+ percent of Federal land out there. So it is much more dependent upon increasing the Federal timber supply to support the mills and increasing capacity for domestic production. So, the initial steps are not going to be sufficient to really address the hazard of the density at this time.

The CHAIRMAN. And where does the U.S. rank on imported lumber as far as other countries?

Mr. DANE. I am afraid I don't have that answer. I know where the U.S. ranks at the top.

The CHAIRMAN. My understanding, it is—up until China had their downturn in the economy, we were number two. Now we are the number one importer of wood products, so—

Mr. DANE. We are number one. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. I don't know how that makes much sense, but, Dr. Monohan, again, thank you for being part and for your—our interactions earlier on in NorCal. Appreciate that. You noted some hesitancy of Forest Service personnel to use new tools and authorities unless that has been a long established pattern. So, there have been discussions with Forest Service on developing training to help familiarize staff with such authorities, so can you talk a little more about what it takes to get personnel up to speed to be either aware of them or be comfortable or even aggressive on implementing them?

Dr. MONOHAN. Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa. The idea or the discussion we had with Chief Schultz and his Office of Tribal Relations, Reed Robinson, was to try and provide training materials that came from the Forest Service for the Forest Service, and that would be the most effective way to have grants and agreements folks, for example, become familiar with how to utilize the Service First authority with Tribes that are coming towards them. We work mostly with people directly in the districts, right—the silviculturists, the forest engineers, sometimes the forest ranger—to be able to identify work that is needed. Those are different folks than the ones that are doing the grants and agreements, and that connection between the two is not something an external partner can necessarily be the best at making. And so, by having those kinds of trainings, that is what we are hoping to be able to improve efficiencies for.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you. My 5 minutes is expiring, but we are going to go to a second round, so I will recognize my colleague, Ms. Salinas, here for her second round.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you for the additional time, Chairman LaMalfa. So, I am going to go back to you, Dr. Monohan. The President's budget proposal includes significant cuts to states' Tribal and private forestry programs, and as we have been talking about, these programs provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and resource managers to help sustain the nation's forests and grasslands, protect communities from wildfire, and restore forest ecosystems. Can you dive in a little bit deeper and describe how Mooretown Rancheria interacts with these programs and what their elimination would actually mean for you and your Tribe?

Dr. MONOHAN. Thank you for the question, Ranking Member Salinas. We are in a time of great change. We are at an inflection point, and we are looking for the most efficient way to do the most basic forestry practices, and sustained funding for ongoing forest management is going to be a critical piece of that. Right now, the funding that we have the most of, the most types, is wildfire crisis funding, so it is after the horrible thing has taken place. It is that crisis funding that comes down to the districts, and it is a response to the wildfire. I think that forests have been in need of ongoing sustained funding for a really long time, and that will be ongoing.

Ms. SALINAS. And would their elimination harm localities' ability to implement responsible forest management practices, and what would the effect be for economic development for Tribes?

Dr. MONOHAN. Every Tribe does forestry a little bit differently. For our Tribe, it could be devastating to not have Federal partners in order to do this work.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. All right. So, I am struggling with trying to figure out what the Administration's plan is around forest management. I am hearing so many different things, and so, Dr. DeLuca, this question will go to you. Adding a billion board-feet of harvest on Federal forests and then this competing idea that we are seeing increases in pests and disease and wildfire risk, and I am not sure how you reconcile a calculated board-feet harvest with our goals on ecosystems and reducing pest disease and wildfires. Can you help explain how we get to balance and some of the scientific research around that?

Dr. DELUCA. I can try. It is—thank you. Yes, it is complex and I can try, but the whole problem here is complexity. I have been thinking about this as my fellow panelists have been talking. We have the significant problem. It is particularly bad in the West and in the dry forest types in particular. The value of the timber that exists in those landscapes, having been managed and then not managed, it is small-diameter, low-value material, and getting it to market is an enormous challenge onto itself. Historically, that was managed by Native American communities for millennia using fire. We are talking about trying to use mechanical treatments to get in and reduce the density of those stands, improve the forest health of those stands. That requires resources because of the fact that the value is low and the distance to markets is far, so it is very complex.

At the same time, the value of timber has dropped through the floor recently, and mills are in trouble. The existing mill infrastructure is in trouble. So, as we are trying to ramp up production on Federal land just by 25 percent, where is that going to go? It does provide an opportunity for private landowners to go into a longer rotation, but they have to be able to sustain that longer rotation in terms of, economically, is it viable to them. So, it is incredibly complex, but I believe that we know where the biggest problems exist on the landscape, and we know where the most structures and people's lives are at risk, and that, of course, is where we have managed heavily in the past and then we ceased that management. So, targeting near communities and in areas of dry forest type make the most sense.

The problem is the highest-value timber isn't going to be located there. It is going to be in wet, more moist forest types and in areas where, yes, forest health treatments are needed, but that may be that it is not at the level of priority as the dry forest types, which lack the mill infrastructure. So, sorry to just amp up the complexity perhaps, but I think that Dr. Monohan's point about fire having been a part of this landscape, it is a fundamental part of the ecology of these forests, and we need to learn how to live with fire and how to work with fire. And that means using those mechanical treatments that allow us to get fire back on the land then allow fire to do the work that it normally does in a way that doesn't threaten communities and threaten lives and economies.

There is also more to say about private land management and the amount of timber that is being generated there *versus* what is being generated on Federal land and putting that in that global context, because, yes, we are importing—30 percent of our total lumber demand is coming from outside the country, and it is coming from places that don't have the environmental laws like we do have here. And so, we actually export an environmental footprint that we don't have necessarily here in this country, and that global context needs to be taken. Sorry I went over a little.

Ms. SALINAS. No. Thank you. Thank you for your response. I only gave you 3 minutes to explain something very complex. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We can loosen up here a little bit at the end, so that is all right. Let me come back to you, Dr. Monohan, on, we were talking about the personnel and ability to get out the tools

and use them a little bit more. Is there any more you wish to finish on that thought before we go to the next thought?

Dr. MONOHAN. I think I said the most important things. I just think that we do need those folks that are familiar with the districts and are designing the treatments that need to be done in those areas to continue to do the work that they are doing on the—on the Forest Service side, if you will.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I guess it is more specific on newer tools and newer ideas that—and authorities, exclusive, *et cetera*. Are they—hasn't been to—seems it hasn't been the participation or desire to use those tools as strongly as some—there is a lot of frustration out there, so.

Dr. MONOHAN. Yes, that is correct.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Dr. MONOHAN. It is definitely people using what they already know or what they were trained to use, and those older ways of doing work are, in general, less efficient than using their Tribal partners through the Service First authority.

The CHAIRMAN. What do we need to take it to the next level? Do you see pent-up demand or roadblocks towards having more Tribal and local participation as more towns have been doing and trying to partner with others on?

Dr. MONOHAN. I think that is the opportunity we are looking at squarely in the face and trying to figure out how to do that. Using Service First for harvesting timber won't necessarily be the right tool. We will need to use the Good Neighbor Authority and thank you for this Committee's work on that.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Dr. MONOHAN. It is very exciting. Again, we have a couple of folks that are interested in having that conversation with us at different forests.

The CHAIRMAN. Are you seeing any impediments to do that right now from the government side, or is it a matter of just getting out there and getting after it?

Dr. MONOHAN. It will be interesting to see how it plays out. It will take time. The treatment has to be fully figured out in order to use a Good Neighbor agreement. That is on the Forest Service's shoulders, and they are at capacity.

The CHAIRMAN. Right.

Dr. MONOHAN. So, the extent to which that gets out to us will depend on their ability to get those treatments ready to be put into an agreement. That is a time-consuming process.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you. Mr. Dane, let's come back to the tree mortality situation a little bit. That mortality seems to be running around nearly two percent per year, additional trees dying off, and that is not counting fire. Is that just insects or age, or other factors?

Mr. DANE. That includes fire from the chart that I submitted with my testimony today.

The CHAIRMAN. It does include fire.

Mr. DANE. Fire, natural disasters, insect infestation, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. I guess when I look at some of our Sierra forests here that haven't burned, like one example east of Fresno there when we have traveled, there are so many gray trees amidst

the green ones, and so that has got to be insect or drought. So, what representation is that of the overall problem?

Mr. DANE. It is a big part of it. In Minnesota, we had a 30,000 acre fire this year. We don't have a lot of wildfires in Minnesota. It was all spruce budworm kill in the National Forest, so infestation and mortality as a result of that definitely has an impact. Many years ago, when Colorado was impacted by the lodgepole pine beetle infestation, the Forest Service, the counties, they got together and said, "Well, we need to address this problem we have here, let's get the loggers to come in here and clean this up." And then they had a little bit more of a conversation and they said, "Wait a minute, where are all the loggers that used to be here in Colorado?" And they said, "Oh, we ran them off 20 years ago."

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Mr. DANE. So, they actually called Minnesota loggers to come down to Colorado to explore cleaning up the timber down there. So, the infestations are a problem, and if you don't have support for a timber industry, you can't just turn the light switch on and bring loggers in to clean up those messes.

The CHAIRMAN. So, you can count on a lot of it being not just insects or drought, but on wildfire, too. Tell me a little about what is your thinking on the way wildfire is handled. We have had some frustration in past years of a monitoring approach with Forest Service on at least several California fires, and even though there were promises made to jump on them as soon as possible, why does it seem there is so much frustration with monitoring, or my deal is I always like to say I would like to get the fire out before it has a name or a tee shirt vendor selling it with the name. So, how do we—what is your—what is your picture—why do you picture that with the—how the veracity of a getting at the fire and how hard it is fought on Federal land?

Mr. DANE. When my son was young, he fell down and got injured and hurt his back, and they were—he actually lost feeling from his waist down for a period of time. And we brought him into the doctor, and the doctor said, "Well, we are going to practice skillful neglect." I said, "What does that that mean?" He said, "We are not going to do anything. We will just watch and see what happens." I think that describes the firefighting response for the past few decades of skillful neglect of monitoring. However, this new Administration, this new fire chief, U.S. Forest Service, USDA is taking a much more aggressive approach to firefighting. Now, it can be argued that that aggressive approach might contribute to the buildup of density and fuels and stuff, but you got one choice or the other, and I think that we can deal with the fuels in a different way than strictly fire.

The CHAIRMAN. Fire is a great tool if used properly. Of course we had an example in New Mexico a few years ago. I wish our colleague could have been here to ask about that, but I think over 300,000 acres from a prescribed fire that was done incorrectly timing-wise, weather-wise, what have you.

Is hesitancy for using more of good fire grow out of that, or are we utilizing prescribed fire the way we should be?

Mr. DANE. I don't think we are utilizing it to the degree that we could be utilizing it. It is very tricky. I have been on wildfires my-

self and everything else like that, so I know one time a fire got away. They do get away, I mean, and it was interesting. The after-action report that came out on that, the Forest Service said we had an over-achievement of our prescribed fire plan.

The CHAIRMAN. Hmm. Yes, treated acres. Ms. Barnes, would you like to touch upon that from the Utah perspective?

Ms. BARNES. Yes, I would. Thank you for that, Mr. Chairman. I think prescribed fire is something we try to use in Utah and use it the right way. This year, we were in a full suppression mode on all fires because of the drought in Utah and because of the excessive fuels. We had two really good winters that had an excessive grass crop with flashy fuels and hot temperatures, but I do think that we have to be careful when we are doing prescribed fire. It is easy to turn a community off to prescribed fire if it is not done in the right way. It is a useful tool on the landscape that can be done wisely and correctly. Right now in Utah, managing our forests is something that we have looked at doing cross-boundary-wise and using all kinds of different methods to do that, but I think it is an important way to use prescribed fire on the landscape. Also, we have a lot of beetle kill in Utah. Trying to figure out what to do with those trees, get in, and reduce those fuels on that landscape is something that is very important to us that we are trying to work through. Those present a catastrophic wildfire hazard, and so reducing that is very important.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I have blown through my timeline that is loosening up here. I will recognize Ms. Salinas for a while.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa. This has been a great conversation. So, Ms. Barnes, in your testimony, you touched on the importance of the Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetics Resources program, which supports tree planting to help rehabilitate forestlands after severe fire events and other natural disasters. Can you share some more specifics as to why additional investment in the reforestation supply chain is needed?

Ms. BARNES. Yes. So, this RNGR program is something that has been really important, bringing partners in for native plant seed, and talking about reforestation work, also for seedling production and focusing on adequate supplies of seedlings. Unfortunately, in Utah, more than a few years ago, probably within the last 10 years, we lost our nursery in Utah, so we rely on other states now for that seedling production or private nurseries in that area for that, or a seed warehouse where we do seeding but don't have any of the seedlings. So, ultimately, this is very important for forest resilience, landscape reclamation, and also just for the rehabilitation after extreme fire events, and it is something that really needs to be focused on.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, and I appreciate that, given that I do have a big nursery industry in Oregon, so I do hope Oregon is a state that you look to, but would love to work with you on that program.

Ms. BARNES. Yes, that would be great.

Ms. SALINAS. Okay, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I wanted to go over this roadless issue a little bit here because it has been made controversial. And so, Ms. Barnes, what have you seen in Utah and the other areas

you have expertise on with—previous roads, we have a lot that has happened in California, but roads that already existed being removed. I know of people saying, “Well, they are paid, contracted to remove roads.” And so, when we talk about roadless areas, what are the facts on areas that did used to have roads and were actually able to be logged, managed, utilized, *et cetera*, and then made roadless because of neglect, became too expensive is sometimes the excuse to maintain, or just, flat, the priorities changed and they didn’t want roads on them anymore. Do you have any insight on that inventory of roads going down *versus* some of the areas being talked about for possible new roads going in?

Ms. BARNES. Yes. I don’t have those exact numbers. I would be happy to provide those with you as far as Utah goes on the inventory of the number of roads. The Roadless Rule in Utah—

The CHAIRMAN. What does the trend feel like to you in Utah then?

Ms. BARNES. There are quite a few areas that have been closed off due to the Roadless Rule that prevents us from getting in and doing work in that area.

The CHAIRMAN. But, you used to have roads or—

Ms. BARNES. Correct, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. So, they have been taken out.

Ms. BARNES. Yes. So, with regard to that, Utah would support being able to get into areas to do fuel mitigation work. The one thing that we can’t control is where that fire starts, and that is the unfortunate place for us. The one thing we can try to control is the fuels, like I was talking about earlier. So, being able to navigate through those areas and remove those hazardous fuels is something that we would benefit from, and also being able to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

The CHAIRMAN. What do you think of this contention that installing roads means more fire where the roads are *versus* how fires are caused, because what I notice in my area is that you will have hundreds—many hundreds of lightning strikes causing fire of one size or the other *versus* roadways that do have people going up and down them. Like, the Carr Fire in Redding was caused by a flat tire on somebody towing a trailer and ground the tire down until you made sparks and it got in the weeds. Even then, the response could have probably put it out, but that is a different story. So, what about this idea that roaded areas are somehow a greater fire danger than natural causes, such as lightning, *et cetera*?

Ms. BARNES. Yes, I think there is truth to that. I mean, in Utah we have a number of human-caused wildfires.

The CHAIRMAN. Sure.

Ms. BARNES. One thing we have done in Utah is we have started what we call the Fire Sense Program, and that is changing human behaviors of how humans start wildfires. We have been really successful at reducing human-caused wildfires in Utah. This is an educational campaign. We have been able to reduce human-caused wildfires. They were up in the upwards of 80 percent. We are now down into the 50 to 60 percent, so that is almost a 60 percent reduction in some years for human-caused wildfires. Unfortunately, this year, we have seen some large fires on our landscape in Utah that have been caused by humans. We also get a lot of dry light-

ning in Utah, and that also causes fires. But I think focusing on what your number one cause of those starts are and starting campaigns like we have for Fire Sense that really focuses on that human behavior change is really, really important. I would encourage other states to look to Utah as we have had a lot of success in that area. The one thing that we can control, and I will go back to that, is just the fuels on the landscape by doing proactive work, and that is something that we are trying to get better at doing.

The CHAIRMAN. Certainly. We have worked legislatively to try to have more clearance around roads, and especially power lines, too, we are not talking every Forest Service road, *per se*, of having a wide gap, but certainly along our highways, our freeways, the bigger roads, we need to have a wider buffer between them and the forested area. And, Mr. Dane, would you touch on that a little bit, too, please with the roadless conversation?

Mr. DANE. Yes. Mr. Chairman, I really appreciate the opportunity. I was getting a little anxious there. I wanted to try chime in there. The Roadless Rule was an end-run to block access, and particularly for logging and mining. That is my opinion, okay? However, it was an artificial restriction. Before the Roadless Rule, for 100 years, forest management was working just fine. So, according to the American Forest Resource Council, nearly half of all roadless acres are located in areas rated as high or very high wild-fire risk. Since the Roadless Rule was enacted, more than 8 million acres of roadless forests have burned, highlighting the consequences of limiting access and management.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. And so, the Roadless Rule was merely put in by the Forest Service as a guidance or as a rule. It wasn't made by a change of law, correct?

Mr. DANE. Yes, it was a rule. In fact, if you look back at the history of it, there were quite a few comments opposing it from within the Forest Service.

The CHAIRMAN. Within the Forest Service. Okay. So, I guess the winds change on that a little bit, don't they? Do you have anything more? You got shorted last time. Okay. All right. Well, I could go all day, but I don't think everybody wants to do that. We are pretty fired up about this issue.

So, I will close a little bit on the personnel, which is indeed a difficult one, with Forest Service, that we know that they have over 11,000 firefighters on hand, which, actually, is above their stated goal for 2025. So, we have—did have—indeed have employees leave the agency, and some do hold red cards and those were able to be recalled, and a handful—300 of them are—came back that actually ever had fire experience. So, the numbers we are talking about on the firefighting side is—we are not out of bounds, so, and, indeed, we will come back to the thought that staffing is a challenge. We had a firing—excuse me—a hiring freeze that was initiated over a year ago under the previous regime as well, you can go back and forth on that, but I think we will continue to work to make sure that we have the best trained, best equipped as best we can, and we will get through this because we want great results.

And the partnerships like Dr. Monohan was working on, and those are pretty great, and many others around the country, so we want to expand upon that with more success in the farm bill. We

still have to address the skinny portion in the farm bill where policy changes and updates will be done here soon, and so, hopefully, we can get that done, right? So, I think we are in a pretty good spot for today's hearing. I look forward to having more here soon. We have been trying to drink from a fire hose so far this year, so I would like to have more of this activity right, Ms. Salinas, and address it because it is a big thing.

Ms. SALINAS. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. It is an ongoing issue in the midst of this fire season here. Thankfully, it hasn't been worse, but I won't say that to people's six-digit fires in their district too much. So, anyway let me get to the legalities here real quickly, and we will—

Ms. SALINAS. Mr. Chairman?

The CHAIRMAN. Did you have a closing thought?

Ms. SALINAS. Just quickly, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Let me recognize Ms. Salinas for a closing statement.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you again to our witnesses for being here today. Like I said, the conversation was very robust, and I think we had a lot of takeaways. And I am really concerned, actually, about our forest health and the capacity to address it at the Federal level, and I don't think we are making the right investments. We weren't at a place of full capacity when I got to Congress in 2023, and the situation has only gotten worse. And from the witnesses today, I think we all do need to work together to figure this out, to make sure that we have market access and a fair level playing field for the wonderful product that we do have here in the United States. And I think we have to figure out how we restore balance, but we do need the help of the Federal Government, and the workforce that it provides, and the right training as well, and that was a big takeaway for me today.

So, I just want to thank, again, our witnesses. I am eager to work across the aisle with my colleagues and to figure out how we move something that meets the moment and meets the demand that we are seeing. So, thank you, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. All right. About to wrap up here, too. So, I guess just one final thought on the roadless areas is that just because it might be declared open to 58 million acres additionally, it doesn't mean all 58 million are going to have that work done on them. It is going to be pretty strategic in where, if it is access to timber or if it is an issue of the best strategy for the infrastructure for fighting fire. Sometimes the things get a little hysterical on that, but certainly you are not going to see all 58 million acres immediately affected by roads. I have had some conservationists or outdoors folks expressing some opinions with me on that, and it is when you are talking about some of our trails for—Pacific Crest Trail, actually, is closed in a portion right now. And that is—you are not going to necessarily preserve all of it by being forced to stay out of it.

So, I think what we are just after here really is the ability to manage the land and have it be healthy, fire safe, and, of course, the economic value that we used to have for our communities that the timber and seeds will bring. Instead, we have to go hat in hand each year and work on this battle for Secure Rural Schools, which

I hope we can get done in this CR round here because we are way over time on that, and it is kind of shameful. So, with that, thank you, panelists. Thank you for your time, your travel, and for everybody taking part, our staff here both sides of the aisle, fellow colleagues.

So, under Rules of the Committee, the record of today's hearing will remain open for 10 calendar days to receive additional material or supplementary written responses from any of the witnesses to any question posed by any of the Members today.

So, this hearing of the Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

