

Written Testimony of Travis Joseph
President and CEO, American Forest Resource Council (AFRC)
before the
Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture
of the House Committee on Agriculture
“Reviewing Partnerships to Enhance Management of the National Forest System”
June 25, 2026

Chairman Newhouse and Ranking Member Salinas, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity. On behalf of the forest products industry and those that steward our federal lands, it is an honor and privilege to share our perspective on the power and importance of partnerships to actively manage our national forests.

Our messages are simple:

- 1) The current management paradigm of national forests is not working.
- 2) Active management is the solution.
- 3) Partnerships are the key to implementing active management at scale.

AFRC and FTPC represent the Partners of the Forest Service

I am Travis Joseph, the President and CEO of the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC). AFRC is a non-profit trade association representing the forest products sector in the West, including members in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, and Nevada. We work on behalf of the mills, loggers, contractors, truck drivers, and working family businesses – small, medium, and large – that help steward America’s federal forests.

I also currently serve as the President of the Federal Timber Purchasers Coalition (FTPC), a national unified voice of federal timber purchasers and contractors with the goal of improving the quality, quantity, and operational viability of active management projects on federal lands. FTPC was originally formed in 1962 (called the Federal Timber Purchasers “Committee”) at the behest of then-Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman who sought a group to be the principal point of contact and communication between the Forest Service and the forest products industry relating to timber sales and timber sale contracts.

These two organizations **represent the partners of the Forest Service**. Our relationship with the Forest Service and federal forests is symbiotic: if our forests go away, so do many of our members. If the Forest Service fails, our businesses and communities suffer. If the forest products industry goes away, the Forest Service will be unable to steward, conserve, and protect our forests. We make up the critical infrastructure – physical and human infrastructure – needed to help address our forest health and wildfire crises on federal lands.

The Current Management Paradigm is not Working

The current approach on federal lands is not working. The Forest Service is relying on a 20th Century “passive” management paradigm to address dynamic, 21st Century ecological, economic, and social challenges. Passive management refers to an approach that minimizes

human intervention and relies on natural ecological processes to drive forest outcomes. The most obvious example of this approach is the Northwest Forest Plan, which governs approximately 24 million acres of federal forests in Western Washington, Western Oregon, and Northern California.

The Northwest Forest Plan was developed and adopted by the Clinton Administration – not Congress – in 1994 with the goal of saving the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) from extinction and providing a predictable volume of timber for local economies. The Plan placed static lines on a map prohibiting or restricting science-based, active forest management on more than 80% of the national forests in the Pacific Northwest.

The Plan has not achieved its stated objectives, yet it has not been updated or modernized since its adoption 30 years ago. The NSO is at serious risk of extinction because of competition from the barred owl and catastrophic wildfires that are destroying millions of acres of old growth forests and owl habitat – not logging.

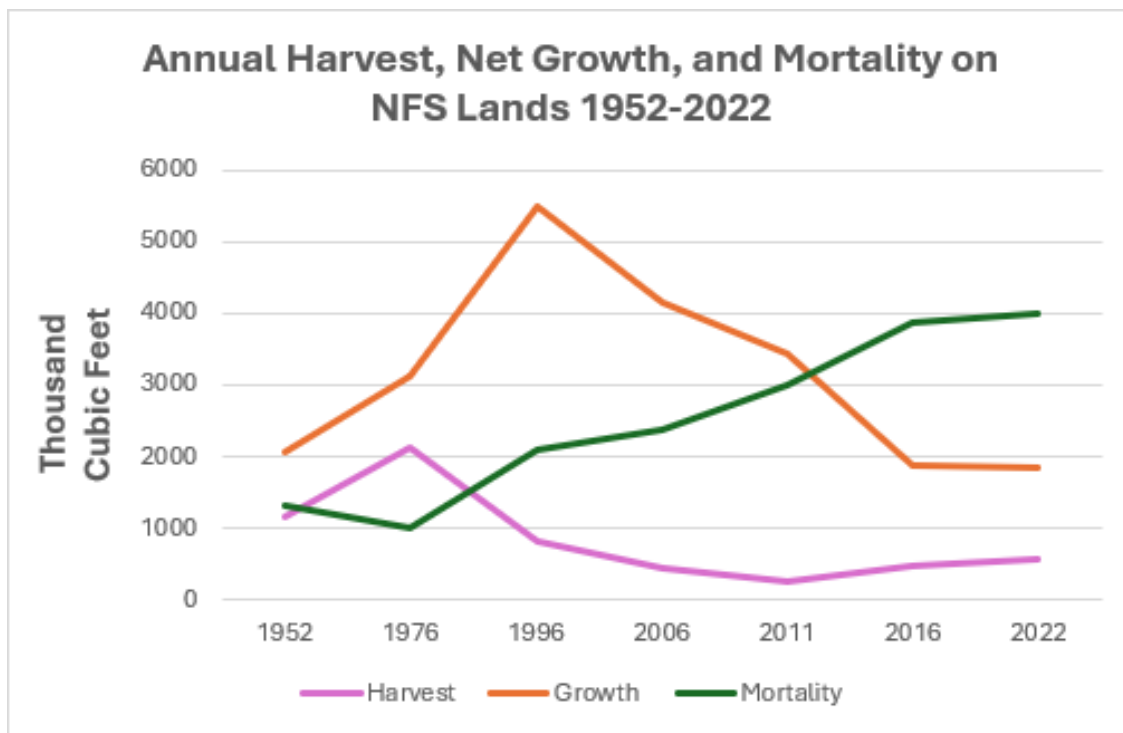
Even though the Plan projected an 80% reduction in timber harvest levels in the Pacific Northwest, the Forest Service has fallen far short of meeting the Probable Sale Quantity, the amount of timber that can be sustainably harvested, outlined in the Plan over the past 30 years. Mills, workers, supply chains, and rural counties and communities that are adjacent to and rely on healthy, productive federal lands have suffered deeply and consistently because of these policy decisions.

Policy Recommendation

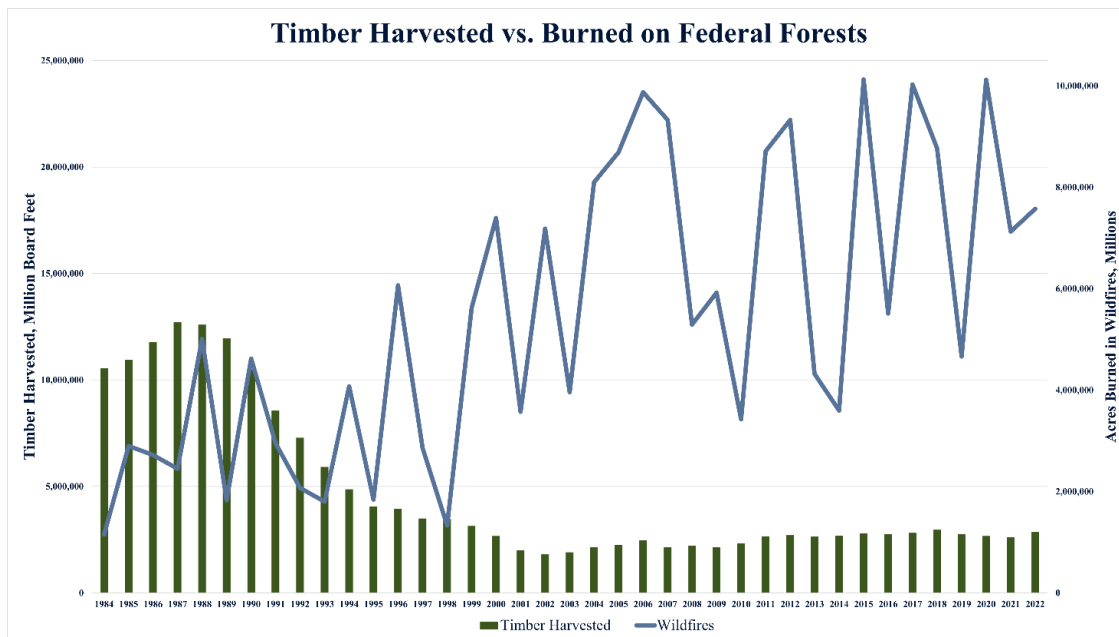
The Biden Administration started a process to narrowly amend the Northwest Forest Plan in 2023. The Trump Administration has continued the process. The Northwest Forest Plan was developed for the conditions and scientific understanding of 1994. Thirty years later, the Forest Service should not settle for an amendment that reinforces the existing framework. The agency should rescope the effort and pursue a broader revision that supports active management, empowers tribal voices, reduces wildfire risk, improves forest health, and restores sustained-yield timber production.

Unfortunately, the trends highlighted above are not unique to the Pacific Northwest. If you zoom out and examine national trends of forest health, wildfire, and timber outputs over the last 60 years, the outcomes are equally sobering:

Over the last six decades, despite an 80% reduction in timber harvests nationally, our national forests are growing *less* and dying *more*.



The federal forest health and wildfire crisis trends can also be expressed by comparing timber harvests levels – one tool of active management – to acres burned:



In both graphics, we see significant spikes in wildfires, forest mortality, and loss in net growth occurring in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This is when the Forest Service made a policy shift to *passive* forest management. A quarter-century later that policy shift continues to impact Americans, businesses, communities, and society in ways we never anticipated or could have imagined.

Consider the public health impacts of wildfire and smoke:

- We now know that wildfire smoke exposure is associated with asthma exacerbations, pulmonary disease, respiratory infections, heart disease, heart failure, pulmonary embolism, strokes, out-of-hospital cardiac arrests, and all-cause mortality. It impacts our brains, lungs, and hearts. It impacts our most vulnerable populations – children, seniors, pregnant women, families in poverty, people with mobility challenges – the hardest and disproportionately.
- A 2024 study found that more than **50,000 people** died prematurely in California alone over a decade due to exposure to toxic particles in wildfire smoke. Over the same period, Californians paid at least **\$432 billion in health expenses** associated with smoke exposure.
- In 2010, less than 350,000 Americans were exposed to at least one day of unhealthy levels of exposure to particulate matter pollution ((PM2.5) from smoke. In 2020, that number increased to **8.3 million Americans exposed to unhealthy levels of PM2.5**.

Consider the environmental consequences of catastrophic wildfires:

- According to data from the National Interagency Fire Center and CALFIRE, between 2001 and 2024, **11.75 million acres out of 15.5 million acres of National Forest system forestland in California burned**, including many acres at a high severity.
- A recent study in the journal [*Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*](#) found that about **3 million acres of medium-to-high priority forestlands in California are on track to convert to brush fields due to a lack of reforestation following wildfire**. Let that sink, 3 million acres deforested from wildfire.
- A University of Chicago study found that a single year of **wildfire emissions is close to double the carbon emissions reductions achieved by California over the previous 16 years** through regulation. The researchers looked at the financial costs and calculated the **carbon emission released from 2020 in California alone caused \$7 billion in total global damages**, or about \$986.9 million in damages to the United States. These damages are in addition to fire control costs, damages from air pollution, and direct costs to life and property.

Consider the consequences to small business, working people, recreation, and access:

- Research has found that hospitality employment declines following major wildfires, with the greatest impacts occurring in communities closest to burned areas. Wildfire smoke also reduces worker productivity and earnings across multiple sectors of the economy. Researchers at Stanford University estimated that **smoke exposure reduces labor income by roughly \$125 billion annually**. The economic impacts extend far beyond the fire perimeter, affecting businesses, workers, and local economies alike.
- Severe wildfires reduce access to public lands and harm recreational opportunities. Research from the University of Colorado found **visitation declined by 15% to 20%** in areas affected by high severity wildfire. In California, **visitation fell by an average of 18%** in the first year after a fire. In areas burned at high severity, **visitation losses reached 33% and showed no recovery even five years later**. Healthy forests support recreation. Catastrophic wildfire closes trails, damages campgrounds, drives away visitors, and leaves lasting impacts on communities and small businesses.
- Notably, the University of Colorado research also found **visitation often increased in areas where forest management treatments had occurred**.



A popular hiking trail on the Umpqua National Forest in Southwest Oregon remains closed six years after the Archie Creek fire burned 131,000 acres due to hazard trees and public safety risks.

Active Management is the Solution

Reversing these trends requires modernizing our approach to federal forest management. It means pivoting from the current passive, preservation management approach to active management.

What is active management? Active management is about applying the right treatment, in the right place, at the right time. Active forest management includes a range of forestry and silviculture tools. This includes commercial timber harvests, thinning, prescribed burning, selective harvesting, and mastication. Active management is about action. It is intentional.

The science and data are clear and indisputable: active forest management works. It can help protect communities, public health, public safety, and human lives from catastrophic wildfires. Active management is a wise investment that saves taxpayer dollars before, during, and after fires.

A new study published in [*Science*](#) last month by researchers at the University of California, Davis found that **every dollar spent on forest health treatments saves about \$3.75 in wildfire damages**. The study is the first to look at the economic value of Forest Service fuel treatments across the West at a large scale. The study estimated that **active management, such as thinning and prescribed burns, prevented \$2.8 billion in losses, reduced wildfire spread and severity**.

A recent meta-analysis published in [*Forest Ecology and Management*](#) reviewed dozens of studies across western conifer forests and found that active management treatments including **mechanical thinning and prescribed fire reduced subsequent wildfire severity by 62% to 72% compared to untreated areas**. The researchers found these treatments were effective across multiple forest types and a wide range of fire weather conditions. The study concluded that active forest management facilitates better outcomes for both forests and people during future wildfire events.

Another study published in [*Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*](#) last year found that **treated forests are 88% less susceptible to high severity wildfire than unmanaged forests**, and can recover carbon stocks in only 7 years, a conclusion reached after reviewing over 200 thinning projects implemented in California over the last decade.

[Research](#) has also shown that larger forest management projects deliver the greatest benefits. Treatments covering more than 2,400 acres produced stronger wildfire resilience outcomes compared with smaller projects.

Policy Recommendation

The Forest Service took a major step forward to modernize the management paradigm of national forests in May 2025 when it released the [National Active Forest Management Strategy](#). The Strategy describes priority actions under four main subject areas: Capacity Building and Streamlining Implementation; Environmental Compliance; Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets; and Salvage and Reforestation. Congress should endorse the National

Active Forest Management Strategy and work with the Forest Service to identify and remove barriers to its implementation.

The Power and Success of Partnerships

Active management of national forests – responsibly stewarding and caring for 193 million acres of multi-use federal lands – **is only possible through partnerships.**

The Forest Service is going through dynamic change: workforce reductions, an agency-wide reorganization, and years of flat or declining Congressional appropriations. At the same time, the Forest Service is being asked to do more: increase capacity for wildfire prevention, protection, and suppression, increase acres treated and timber harvest levels; maintain and increase public access and recreational opportunities.

In other words, the Forest Service is being asked by Congress and Administrations to do more, with less. The only way the agency will be successful in achieving and delivering those outcomes to the American public is by building and investing in existing and new partnerships. Here are a few examples of successful partnerships that can and should be replicated across the West:

Tribal Partnerships and Co-Management

For decades, the Federal government has excluded Tribes from meaningful collaboration and consultation in informing, planning, executing, and monitoring decisions on public lands. This is morally wrong and must change. Tribes are critical partners to restoring active management and stewardship to federal forests. We strongly support the Forest Service's current efforts to expand Tribal partnerships and co-management.

For example, this year, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians (Cow Creek Tribe) and the Forest Service signed a groundbreaking stewardship government-to-government agreement to accelerate wildfire mitigation and forest health treatments across 155,000 acres of the Umpqua National Forest and Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

Over the last decade, nearly one million acres within the Cow Creek Tribe's ancestral lands have burned. The agreement provides the Cow Creek Tribe with the opportunity to be active participants – and active managers – to exercise its expertise in forest management to protect cultural lands and resources. The remarks of the Chairwoman of the Cow Creek Tribe, Carla Keene, at the signing are worth noting:

“Our ancestors understood what we know today: that healthy forests require active management, cultural knowledge, and a commitment that extends far beyond any one generation. This agreement doesn't only mark an important moment in our Tribal history, but for anyone in Oregon who wants fewer wildfires, less smoke, and healthier forests” (emphasis added).

Shared Stewardship opportunities directly support long-term shared goals by allowing Tribes and federal agencies to work together at a meaningful scale. For the Cow Creek Tribe, this work aligns closely with the Tribe's priorities of wildfire prevention, ecological protection, and

community advancement. It also supports the Forest Service's goals of improving forest resilience, restoring healthy ecosystems, and strengthening local communities. At the heart of this partnership is a shared commitment to the same outcomes: healthier forests, safer communities, and more effective stewardship of the land.

Tribes throughout the Pacific Northwest and West are eager to pursue similar opportunities and partnerships.



The 2020 Archie Creek fire six years later. A dead national forest – and Roadless Area – as far as you can see. This picture was taken on June 12, 2026. Current laws and regulations, such as the Roadless Rule, do not encourage timely, active management and restoration after a catastrophic wildfire event. It is unlikely this forest stand will naturally regenerate and may be converted to brush.

Policy Recommendation

Congress should look to expand tribal co-management authorities over adjacent Federal lands. The Indian Trust Asset Reform Act (ITARA) and The FORESTS Act provide promising management tools, efficiencies, and authorities that would increase Tribe-led active management of at-risk public lands while still complying with federal environmental laws.

State and County Partnerships: Shared Stewardship/Good Neighbor Authority

States and counties are, and will continue to be, essential to actively managing federal forests to address wildfire and forest health threats. Montana is a great example of the progress and potential for federal-state cooperation, particularly of the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA).

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (Montana DNRC) and the Forest Service have grown the Montana GNA program significantly since its first year in 2018,

when there was a single project. Seven years later, in Fiscal Year 2025, there were over 70 projects and 54 million board feet of timber sold through the Montana GNA.

Shared stewardship allows land managers to collaboratively identify needs, set priorities, and coordinate work across boundaries. By combining expertise, projects can move more efficiently from planning to implementation. A year ago, Montana DNRC and the Forest Service signed an agreement establishing a new framework for coordinated, cross-boundary active forest management between the agency and the state. The first two priority landscapes include over 400,000 acres within the Flathead, Kootenai and Bitterroot National Forests. This year, another 345,000 acres were added to the Shared Stewardship agreement for a total of 750,000 acres in Montana.

Similarly, in neighboring Idaho, the state has over 6 million acres of forestland designated as “high risk” for insect and disease outbreaks and potential catastrophic wildfire. The State of Idaho collaborated with the Forest Service to achieve a Shared Stewardship agreement signed in 2018.

The Idaho Department of Lands, the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are sharing staff, funding and are joining with a governor-appointed advisory group to identify mutual priorities and cross-boundary forest management opportunities. The [Idaho Forest Action Plan](#) serves as a path forward for identifying and addressing forest threats across the state. The Idaho Shared Stewardship initiatives include the all-lands strategies, GNA projects, and cross-boundary project work to mitigate these threats across forested lands in Idaho.

Under Chief Schultz’s leadership, the Forest Service is now renewing and expanding Shared Stewardship agreements with all 50 States, several territories, Tribes, and other partners. We strongly support these efforts. We believe Federal-state partnerships are essential to increasing active management of national forests.

Policy Recommendation

Currently, GNA cooperators are authorized to repair, construct, decommission, and restore Forest Service roads, or construct temporary roads necessary to complete authorized restoration work. However, construction of permanent roads is not authorized. This blanket prohibition – regardless of the conditions on the ground – has been a roadblock to GNA partners to expanding and completing needed restoration and fuel reduction work in some areas. Removing this roadblock is a major priority for proactive GNA states and partners throughout the country.

We strongly support a targeted technical fix to Section 2113a (a)(4)(B)(i) of the GNA authority to clarify a bipartisan goal (restoration) and reduce ambiguity and legal risk.

Partnerships with the Forest Products Industry

On national forests, the forest products industry is the contractor that executes the active management work and multiple-use mission of federal land management agencies. The Forest Service has depended on our sector to achieve the agency’s land management and conservation goals since its founding in 1905.

We are critical partners of the Forest Service and we have been for over 120 years.

We buy federal timber on the most regulated lands on planet earth. We harvest using the best science and most advanced forest practices in the world. We bring it to local mills and make all kinds of wood products used for everything you can think of: from housing and construction, to paper and packaging, to pharmaceuticals, food, and renewable energy and fuel.

That's just the start. We do so much more. Our members grow and plant millions of seedlings every year on federal lands. We do **wildfire detection** and **suppression**. **Wildfire prevention** work. Fish and wildlife habitat restoration. Trail construction. Road repair and maintenance.

Across the country, our members employ tens of thousands of certified foresters, engineers, scientists, welders, mechanics, heavy equipment operators, IT professionals, accountants, lawyers, and drone pilots – just to name a few.

We have the expertise. The capacity. The will. The motivation. The innovation. The creativity. We're problem solvers. We share common values and interests. The forest products industry – my members – are here to work with you, Congress and the land management agencies, as partners to responsibly steward our federal lands and forests; reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire; and improve forest health.

Here are a few examples of our success stories:

Shaded Fuel Breaks



The above picture is of a shaded fuel break in northern California along a major highway corridor. It grew out of an agreement with the Department of Agriculture last year that was made possible by Congressional funding. In this case, a private forestland owner worked with the Forest Service, CALFIRE firefighters, and other experts to create defensible space in strategic locations to help prevent the kind of wildfires that have wiped out entire communities in California.

The project is happening right now with the goal of establishing a comprehensive fuel break network over the next three years to protect lives, property, critical water infrastructure, and the environment.

Fuel breaks have a 68% [success rate](#) in containing fires when coupled with the proper suppression resources. The cost of maintaining fuel breaks is a fraction of the cost of wildfire suppression. In California, the communities of Butte Meadows and Forest Ranch were protected in the 2024 Park Fire due to the [Highway 32 Fuel Break](#) (video). San Diego County benefitted from a federally managed [fuel break](#), slowing down the progression of the 2024 Grove 2 Fire.

I took this picture last week and saw, firsthand, the effectiveness and potential of shaded fuel breaks. It is just one project, one partnership, on one at-risk landscape. This example represents what is possible. It represents opportunity. Other forest product companies and partners –

AFRC members – are doing shaded fuel breaks throughout the West. This is good forestry. These are smart investments. This is proactive management. We need to do more, and faster.

Policy Recommendation

Congress should authorize and appropriate specific, consistent, annual funding for strategic fuel breaks systems across ownership boundaries focusing on the most at-risk landscapes and communities.

Congress established a fuel break CE of up to 1,000 feet wide and encompassing up to 3,000 acres in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Congress should expand the size of this critical wildfire prevention tool to match conditions and needs on the ground.

Hazard Tree Removal

Catastrophic wildfires, disease and insect infestations, and weather events are not only destroying and deforesting millions of acres of national forests, they are closing tens of thousands of miles of roads and trails that are essential to public access of public lands. This means long-term or permanent closures to some of the most popular campgrounds, hiking trails, boat launches, and other recreational sites across the West – not to mention critical access and control lines for firefighters.

On the Forest Service [webpage](#), the agency is clear about the dangers of hazard trees: “Dead and dying trees, or snags, pose a major threat to wildland firefighter safety. *Tree strikes are among the most frequent causes of severe injury and sometimes death*” (emphasis added).

The dangers and risks are not limited to firefighters in the backcountry. Tragically, in 2023, a hazard tree – a dead tree on the side of Idaho Highway 55 near Horseshoe Bend – fell and hit a car killing an 8th grader named Colton Jones.

The scale and scope of hazard trees across national forests is almost incomprehensible. The Forest Service estimates that there are over **100 million trees** killed or weakened by drought and bark beetles that ***are a falling hazard in the Pacific Southwest Region alone***. The Forest Service maintains a [National Snag Hazard Map](#) to help the public and firefighters identify areas with the highest risk of severe injury or death.

In 2021, the Forest Service attempted to reopen 170,000 acres of the Willamette National Forest to the public that were impacted by the 2020 Labor Day Fires. The Forest Service planned to remove hazard trees along 400 miles of forest roads. Anti-forestry groups sued. A federal judge halted the plan and questioned the agency’s analysis and expertise to identify and remove trees that pose the highest risk to the public and firefighters. *Cascadia Wildlands v. Warnack*, 570 F. Supp. 3d 983 (D. Or. 2021). The project didn’t happen.



Hundreds of miles of roads and trails remain closed on the Willamette National Forest in Western Oregon, six years after the Labor Day Fires burned over one million acres across the state. Courtesy: Statesman Journal File, published November 5, 2021.

A year before in 2020, the Forest Service attempted to remove fire-damaged trees on 7,000 acres in the Mendocino National Forest in response to the 2018 Ranch Fire, the then-largest wildfire in California history that burned 410,000 acres, including 288,000 acres in Mendocino National Forests (the August Complex Fire burned 1.032 million acres in 2020 across seven counties and is now the largest wildfire in California history). An anti-forestry group sued and sought a preliminary injunction. A split Ninth Circuit panel opinion reversed the district court and granted the preliminary injunction, ultimately blocking the time-sensitive project. Two judges opined that the anti-forestry group was likely to succeed on the merits of its claims that the Forest Service's choice to rely on the road maintenance Categorical Exclusion (CE) to clear all trees deemed hazardous within 200 feet of the road was arbitrary and capricious. The work did not get done. *Env't Prot. Info. Ctr. v. Carlson*, 968 F.3d 985 (9th Cir. 2020). The roads, trails, and impacted forests are still closed and dangerous.

The Forest Service currently lacks a streamlined authority to remove hazard trees, which has forced the agency to close roads, trails, and campgrounds and simply walk away. These outcomes are unacceptable, and unsustainable.

The forest products industry regularly, effectively, and safely removes hazard trees on neighboring private, county, and state forestland and roads throughout the West – and on federal land and roads when given the chance. If done quickly, mills can recover economic value in hazard trees and actually pay the Forest Service to remove the hazards, open the roads, and reduce fuels. Those payments can be used to conduct additional post-fire restoration work.

On the other hand, if delayed, that value is lost and taxpayers have to pick up the bill to cut down hazard trees, leave them on the ground to fuel the next fire, or accept the permanent closure of the road network.

We stand ready to help the Forest Service to quickly clean up and remove hazard trees along critical forest roads and trails after catastrophic events so the public can access their lands, and firefighters have safer access to protect national forests and communities.

Policy Recommendation

Congress should legislate a hazard tree CE to give the Forest Service flexibility and legal certainty to remove hazard trees that pose a risk to the public, firefighters, and public access. In the bipartisan House and Senate versions of the Fix Our Forest Act the type of CE needed by the Forest Service is *described*, but the bill directs the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate the CE within one year. Finalizing a new hazard tree CE through the administrative process will take years to complete, be litigated, and likely not be given the same deference as a legislated CE in court. Congress should provide clarity, predictability, and direction to the Forest Service through legislation.

Post Wildfire Restoration and Reforestation

Similarly, after major wildfires, drought, wind or ice events, volcanoes (see below), insect infestation, or disease impact forests, the Forest Service is unable to remove dead and dying trees from devastated landscapes, leaving millions of dead trees to fall, rot, and become dangerous fuel loads for future wildfires on millions of acres of federal forests. Inaction to “salvage” high mortality landscapes is a public safety and environmental hazard, and impedes the agency’s ability to safely and successfully replant federal forests – leading to massive deforestation.

There is no better visual of the consequences of action vs. inaction than the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens and its impact to surrounding federal and private forestland. Dead and dying trees on private forestland (Weyerhaeuser) were immediately harvested and replanted with seedlings. Beginning in 1981, more than 18 million seedlings were planted across 45,000 acres of private land. Weyerhaeuser’s lands are reforested and have even been thinned and managed since the eruption.

Congress took a different course in 1982 and established the blast zone as the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The monument is “managed” by the Forest Service. Dead and dying trees were not removed and the area was not replanted. What outcome (see below) do you think the American public would prefer today, more than 45 years later?

Mount St. Helens

Blast Zone Reforestation



Even when the Forest Service does attempt to move forward to salvage and restore federal forests after these events, current processes and litigation prevent the agencies from doing so in a timely manner (within 1-2 years after an event). This prevents or discourages the agencies from removing dead and dying trees and selling them to local mills and utilizing the revenue to restore national forests. It also makes reforestation extremely expensive and difficult to achieve – or it does not happen at all due to safety and operational concerns posed by dead trees.

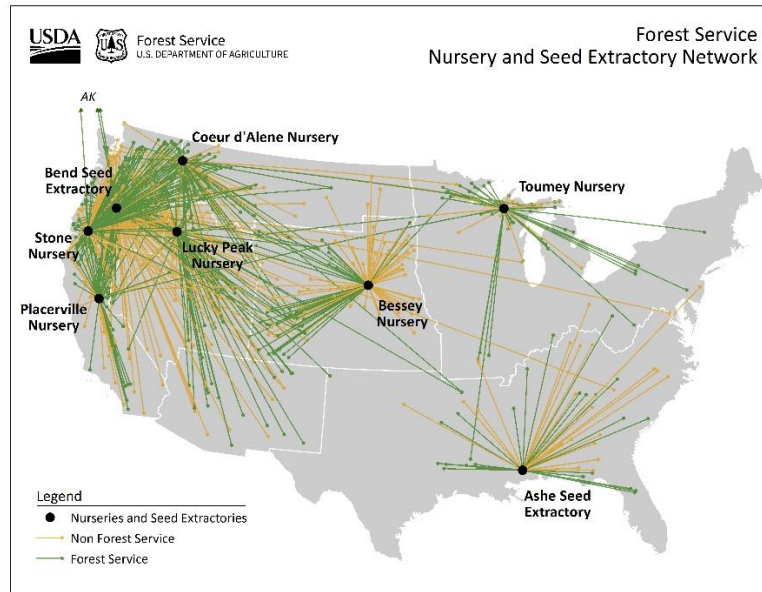
Unfortunately, the Forest Service only annually reforests 6% of its burned lands. The result is a backlog of nearly 4 million acres of unmet reforestation needs. Failing to restore, rehabilitate, and replant millions of acres of federal forests after catastrophic events – land owned by the American public – is unacceptable and would be unconscionable on private forestland. As a consequence, we are losing federal forests to conversion.

As mentioned above, a California study found that about 3 million acres of medium-to-high priority forestlands are on track to convert to brush fields. That's over 60% of the size of the State of New Jersey. If the recent trend continues, the study found that we are looking at the widespread loss of conifer forests in California. Sadly, we know federal forests face a similar crisis in other Western states. High-severity wildfires are now driving 81% of the reforestation need across the U.S.

The forest products industry regularly, effectively, and safely salvages, restores, and replants neighboring private, county, and state forestland throughout the West after catastrophic events.

For example, after the 2020 Labor Day Fires in Oregon, the Forest Service replanted 75,000 acres of the 215,000 acres burned at medium to high severity, or about 34%. Large private landowners replanted approximately 180,000 acres out of 187,000 acres burned at medium to high severity, or 95%. We know how to do restoration.

We also know how to grow and replant seedlings. In 2021, Oregon produced 86 million seedlings. Washington produced 53 million seedlings. California produced more than 25 million seedlings. Idaho and Montana added another 7 million seedlings. The Forest Service will increasingly rely on private nurseries and seed extractories to meet the growing reforestation needs and backlog.



We stand ready to help the Forest Service – and Congress – address our post-disturbance restoration and replanting roadblocks.

Policy Recommendation

To expedite and encourage the Forest Service to remove dead and dying trees, recover and capture the economic value of dead trees in a timely fashion, and improve conditions necessary to replant after disturbances, the Forest Service needs a legislative tool to take quick action after a catastrophic event. Currently, the Forest Service can use a CE to treat, or “salvage,” a maximum of 250 acres. The limited scope of the current CE prevents the agencies from addressing the scope and scale of 21st Century wildfire, wind and ice storm events, footprints that commonly exceed hundreds of thousands of acres.

Policy Recommendation

One of the greatest risks to the Forest Service’s ability to complete science-based, active forest management with partners *at scale* is litigation. The Forest Service is the most litigated agency in the federal government. Litigation often stalls, delays, or stops active management, even though the Forest Service successfully defends and wins a majority of its cases. Litigation is expensive, adversarial, and undermines collaboration and trust with stakeholders and partners.

While not under the exclusive jurisdiction of this Committee, Congress must consider common sense reforms to reduce anti-forestry litigation. In order to attract the necessary public-private investments, people, technical skills, and equipment and infrastructure needed to restore national forests, targeted litigation reform is needed to create a more predictable, stable, and less risky environment for partners. For reference, I provided extensive [testimony and recommendations](#) during a House Natural Resources Oversight and Investigations subcommittee hearing on December 10, 2025.

Conclusion

As those who work in and near national forests every day, we can tell you the scale of our federal forest and wildfire crisis is staggering. The status quo is broken, putting these public forests and all their invaluable benefits at unacceptable risk. It's a threat to countless rural communities. To public health and safety. To our neighbors. To our businesses.

We are asking Congress to zoom out. Look at the current system and paradigm. We need to rethink our approach, entirely and holistically. We need to ask important questions:

What outcomes do we want from our federal forests?

Are we achieving those outcomes? If not, why?

How do we align and modernize our laws and regulations to address 21st Century challenges and create new opportunities on our national forests?

We can and must solve this – together. Creative, powerful solutions exist. Good forestry and good forest stewardship are not partisan issues. Partnerships are essential – in fact the only way – that Congress and the Forest Service will be able to deliver better environmental, health, and economic outcomes to the American public. These lands belong to all Americans.

Count the forest products industry in. We're here. We're at the table. We want durable, bipartisan solutions. We want healthy forests and healthy communities.