

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Friday, July 20, 2012  
[PERMALINK](#)

CONTACT: [Crystal Feldman](#), [Spencer Pederson](#) or [Jill Strait](#)  
202-226-9019

## Witnesses Emphasize Need for Bills to Reduce Risk of Megafires to Aid Forest Health, Protect Local Communities, Create Jobs

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands held a [hearing](#) on legislation intended to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, restore forest health, and address factors that contribute to insect infestation and wildfire. Decades of severe mismanagement of our public lands have contributed to increased forest density, overgrowth, and insect infestation, conditions that increase the risk and severity of catastrophic wildfire. As of last month, over 25,000 fires have burned well over one million acres just this year.

*“Decades of failed policies and hands-off management of our forests have left the majority of these lands in an unnatural, and unhealthy state. What was once a valuable asset that provided raw material for a growing and prosperous nation, clean water, recreation and numerous other benefits has deteriorated into an extreme liability to western communities and the environment. It is time for a paradigm shift in restoring our landscape so that national forests can once again meet the purposes for which they were established,”* [said Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop \(UT-01\)](#).

[H.R. 6089](#), the *Healthy Forest Management Act of 2012*, introduced by Colorado Members Scott Tipton, Doug Lamborn, Mike Coffman, and Cory Gardner, aims to address threats to forest health, public safety, and wildlife habitat presented by the risk of wildfire on public lands by requiring the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to expedite forest management projects relating to hazardous fuel reduction, forest health, and economic development.

[Tom Jankovsky](#), a County Commissioner in Garfield County, Colorado, testified on the jobs and economic benefits of the *Healthy Forest Management Act of 2012*. According to his testimony, H.R. 6089 *“supports an emerging forest restoration industry, which provides tools and manpower for forest restoration and contributes to economic certainty. Passage of the bill will provide natural resources for lumber mills, furniture, firewood, biomass, and wood pellets, helping all of the related industries. The bill creates jobs and provides other positive economic impacts in our local communities.”* Commissioner Jankovsky also testified to the public safety and stewardship benefits of the bill. *“The Healthy Forest Management Act takes management and restoration beyond the forest and wild land urban interface and into our communities. This bill will create a healthy forest with less risk to urban areas.”*

*“This legislation builds on the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 by*

*empowering states counties, and tribes to have a more active role in addressing these emergency circumstances, we can proactively manage our forests, reduce future destruction from wildfires, safeguard water supplies and species habitats, and promote a healthy natural environment. Utilizing the tools in Healthy Forests Restoration Act which have proven to be effective, the Healthy Forest Management Act can help reduce the cost imposed on taxpayers due to litigation, expedite emergency mitigation procedures, and restore our forests before they go up in flames, when the costs are far greater. H.R. 6089 prioritizes conservation and will help reduce the investment required of taxpayers by making public private partnerships more feasible,” [said H.R. 6089 sponsor Scott Tipton \(CO-03\)](#). “This bill allows those who are most directly impacted by wildfire to take proactive measures to address the problem and mitigate the root causes of catastrophic wildfire.”*

[H.R. 5744](#), the *Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act of 2012*, bipartisan legislation sponsored by Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar, would increase local control over forest management and wildfire prevention. According to witness [David Cook](#), a public land rancher and the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association Federal Lands Vice-Chair, the *Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act of 2012* “will expedite projects (timber thinning and livestock grazing), encouraging free enterprise solutions on federal lands to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire, ultimately reducing threats to communities, the landscape, and endangered species.” Cook continued, “It will be through the empowerment of private investment, individuals and communities that we set the guidepost for future forest planning. We need to direct and see through the initiative to return people to work in the woods, protect habitats and communities and return to the days of 5,000 to 10,000 acre fires in our forests – not 500,000 acre catastrophes. ... H.R. 5744 will provide tools the agencies need to effectively manage the Nation’s forests.”

*“My bill authorizes the Forest Service and Department of the Interior to implement wildfire prevention projects, including timber harvests and livestock grazing, in at-risk forests and threatened and endangered species habitat that focus on surface, ladder and canopy fuels reduction activities. In other words: it streamlines the review process, improves local coordination eliminates duplication, and sets firm time frames to bring more accountability to the process,” [said H.R. 5744 sponsor Paul Gosar \(AZ-01\)](#).*

###

<http://naturalresources.house.gov>

[Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Twitter](#)