

ROB BISHOP, UT  
CHAIRMAN  
DON YOUNG, AK  
LOUIE GOHMERT, TX  
DOUG LAMBORN, CO  
ROBERT J. WITTMAN, VA  
JOHN FLEMING, LA  
TOM McCLINTOCK, CA  
GLENN THOMPSON, PA  
CYNTHIA LUMMIS, WY  
DAN BENISHEK, MI  
JEFF DUNCAN, SC  
PAUL A. GOSAR, AZ  
RAÚL R. LABRADOR, ID  
DOUG LAMALFA, CA  
BRADLEY BYRNE, AL  
JEFF DENHAM, CA  
PAUL COOK, CA  
BRUCE WESTERMAN, AR  
GARRET GRAVES, LA  
DAN NEWHOUSE, WA  
RYAN ZINKE, MT  
JODY HICE, GA  
AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN, AS  
TOM MacARTHUR, NJ  
ALEX MOONEY, WV  
CRESENT HARDY, NV

JASON KNOX  
STAFF DIRECTOR

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**Opening Statement of**  
**Chairman Tom McClintock**  
**Subcommittee on Federal Lands**

**On Wednesday, June 3, 2015**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**Hearing on a Discussion Draft "Returning Resilience to our Overgrown, Fire-prone**  
**National Forests Act of 2015"**

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, AZ  
RANKING MEMBER  
GRACE F. NAPOLITANO, CA  
MADELINE Z. BORDALLO, GU  
JIM COSTA, CA  
GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN, CNMI  
NIKI TSONGAS, MA  
PEDRO R. PIERLUISI, PR  
JARED HUFFMAN, CA  
RAUL RUIZ, CA  
ALAN LOWENTHAL, CA  
MATTHEW CARTWRIGHT, PA  
DON BEYER, VA  
NORMA J. TORRES, CA  
DEBBIE DINGELL, MI  
MARK TAKAI, HI  
RUBEN GALLEG0, AZ  
LOIS CAPPS, CA  
JARED POLIS, CO

DAVID WATKINS  
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

Today the Subcommittee on Federal Lands meets to consider draft legislation entitled, *"Returning Resilience to our Overgrown, Fire-prone National Forests Act of 2015."* This legislation has been compiled by the committee following very detailed hearings since the beginning of this session on the declining health of our forests and the policies responsible.

As this Subcommittee has met to hear the testimony of county supervisors, retired Forest Service employees, professors of forestry and law, water board officials, environmentalists, professional foresters, and many others, one consistent point was made: our federal forests are in grave danger.

Up until the mid-1970's, we managed our National Forests according to well-established and time-tested forest management practices. These practices, supported by sound science, managed the forests to prevent vegetation and wildlife from overgrowing the ability of the land to support it. Not only did this assure robust and healthy forests capable of resisting fire, disease and pestilence, it also supported a thriving economy. Revenues from the sale of excess timber, grazing and cabin permits, mining and recreational activities provided a steady stream of revenues to the treasury which could, in turn, be used to further improve the public lands.

But 40 years ago, we replaced these sound management practices by what can only be described as a doctrine of benign neglect. Ponderous, Byzantine, and highly litigious laws and bureaucratized agencies promised to "save the environment." The advocates of this doctrine have dominated our law, our policies, our courts and our agencies ever since.

These policies have been weighed by experience and found wanting: not only have they decimated the economy – they have immeasurably damaged the environment.

Surplus timber harvested from of our national forests has dropped dramatically since the 1980's, while acreage destroyed by forest fire increased concurrently. Wildlife habitats that were supposed to be preserved are now being incinerated. Precipitation that once flowed to riparian habitats now evaporates in overgrown canopies or is quickly claimed in

the fierce competition of densely packed vegetation. We have lost vast tracts of national forests to beetle infestations as weakened trees can no longer resist their attacks.

Revenues that our forest management agencies once produced – and that facilitated our forest stewardship – have all but dried up. This has devastated mountain communities that once thrived from the forest economy, while precious resources are diverted for life-line programs like Secure Rural Schools and PILT. Despite a growing population, visitation to our national forests has declined significantly. We can no longer manage lands to prevent fire or even salvage dead timber once fire has destroyed it.

Appeals, lawsuits and especially the threat of lawsuits has paralyzed and demoralized the Forest Service and created perverse incentives to ‘do nothing.’

Worse, the steadily deteriorating situation is forcing managers to raid forest treatment and fire prevention funds to pay for the growing costs for wildfire suppression, creating a death spiral – the more we raid prevention funds the more wildfires we have; the more wildfires we have, the more we raid prevention funds. This negative feedback loop must be stopped and we will give high priority to a lasting solution in the days ahead.

By all accounts, our private lands are conspicuously healthier than the public lands precisely because they are freed from so many of the laws that are tying the hands of our public foresters. These policies may be making environmental law firms rich, but they are killing our National Forests.

The legislation before us is the first step toward restoring sound, rational and scientific management of our national forests. I want particularly to single out the work of our colleagues, Mr. Zinke of Montana and our resident forester, Mr. Westerman of Arkansas, for their yeoman work in advancing reforms in this bill. It requires forest managers to consider the cost of no action alternatives; it streamlines fire and disease prevention programs and assures that fire-killed timber can be quickly removed to create both revenues and room to restore fire-damaged lands. It protects forest managers from frivolous lawsuits.

This draft seeks to provide the Forest Service with immediate reforms that require no new regulations, rules, planning or mapping. Instead, it builds on existing authorities from the 2014 Farm Bill that has been successfully implemented.

The management of the public lands is OUR responsibility. For 40 years, we have experimented with laws that have proven disastrous to the health of our forests, the preservation of our wildlife, and the economies of our communities. THAT is on us. And THAT is about to change.