



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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Witnesses and Members Agree Active Forest Management Will Help Prevent Catastrophic Wildfires

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation held an oversight hearing on *“Wildfire and Forest Management.”* The hearing focused on the need for increased forest management to reduce hazardous fuels and the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

Last year, 9.3 million acres burned due to forest fires and was the third worst fire season on record for acres burned. Meanwhile only 200,000 acres were harvested last year by the U.S. Forest Service. The lack of common sense management to remove excess growth are making our forest increasingly susceptible to catastrophic wildfires that threaten public safety, the economic livelihood of communities, water supply and forest health.

“There will always be drought, there will always be heat spells, and there will always be fire that is out of our control,” said [Committee Chairman Doc Hastings \(WA-04\)](#). *“While our hearts are with the families and communities affected by wildfire and those who put themselves in harm’s way to protect us from it, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and what must be cured are the overgrown and unhealthy forests that are in many cases providing the fuel for these fires.”*

“It was made very clear by all witnesses during today’s hearing that there is an obvious need for improved forest management and fuel load reduction,” said **Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01)**. *“Wildfires are often unavoidable acts of mother nature and unfortunately sometimes they are man-made. Either way, the best thing we can do to mitigate damage is to improve forest health by eradicating infestations and removing dead, decaying timber, as is often done on non-federal lands. It seems there is consensus amongst all that we can and should do a better job of protecting and preserving our national forests. I am optimistic that we can come together to reduce the growing fuel loads that lead to catastrophic fires and look forward to helping ensure that the U.S. Forest Service, land managers, and timber industry have the resources necessary to make this happen sooner rather than later.”*

During the hearing, all witnesses agreed on the need for increased forest management to reduce hazardous fuels and diseases that have made national forests increasingly

susceptible to large scale fires:

- *“It is widely recognized that management of our forest resources has not kept pace with the ever increasing need for restoration. We must manage and restore more acres to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire, to address insects and disease, and to restore the ecological health of forests for the benefit of all Americans.”* - [James Hubbard](#), Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- *“We recovered significant economic value from dead and dying trees, and the reduction in forest density promoted forest health and resiliency. While such forest health treatments are common on tribal lands, it would be a challenge to find similar speed, scope and effectiveness on federal forests.”* - [Phil Rigdon](#), Deputy Director, Yakama Indian Nation Department of Natural Resources.
- *“Poor forest condition is one of the primary factors that have led to destructive wildfires and catastrophic insect and disease outbreaks. The response has been to deal with the impacts (i.e. unwanted wildland fire), rather than improve the health of our forests through thinning and other management activities.”* - [Joseph Duda](#), Deputy State Forester, Colorado State Forest Service
- *“By some estimates, more than 82 million acres of Forest Service lands and hundreds of millions of acres of other Federal lands are at increased risk of catastrophic wildfire. Even in landscapes where fires are infrequent, fuel loads and mortality are well outside of historic norms. These fuel problems lead to large scale forest mortality and increased occurrence of catastrophic wildfires.”* - [Chuck Roady](#), Federal Forest Resource Coalition.
- *“We must collectively and immediately dedicate ourselves to finding a way to effectively support both essential emergency wildfire preparedness and response AND the proactive fuels reduction and forest restoration that are needed to reduce the demand for emergency expenditures in the future. Our current approach to wildland fire and forest management creates a false choice, pitting the viability of one against the other. In reality, we cannot afford to short-change either.”* - [Christopher Topik](#), Ph.D, Director, Resorting America’s Forests, The Nature Conservancy.

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