



To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Republican Staff; Brandon Miller (Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov) (x6-7736)
Date: April 26, 2021
Subject: Oversight Hearing on “Wildfire in a Warming World: Opportunities to Improve Community Collaboration, Climate Resilience, and Workforce Capacity”

The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “Wildfire in a Warming World: Opportunities to Improve Community Collaboration, Climate Resilience, and Workforce Capacity” on **Thursday, April 29th, 2021 at 1:00pm EST**. This is a virtual hearing.

Member offices are requested to notify Brandon Miller no later than **Tuesday, April 27, at 4:30pm EST**, if their Member intends to participate. Submissions for the hearing record must be submitted through the Committee’s electronic repository at HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov. Please contact David DeMarco (David.DeMarco@mail.house.gov) or Everett Winnick (Everett.Winnick@mail.house.gov) should any technical difficulties arise.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- Due to decades of mismanagement, our national forests and public lands have seen steady increases in both the size and devastation of wildfire season. Over 68 million acres have burned in the last decade, and over 10 million acres burned in 2020 alone.¹

These fires have caused enormous environmental damage, emitting hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere year after year, and destroying countless acres of wildlife habitat and natural ecosystems in the process.

- Committee Democrats have consistently pushed a false narrative that climate change is solely responsible for the worsening wildfire crisis, while largely ignoring the overwhelming proof that the real culprit is inadequate forest management and a loss of a healthy forest economy.
- Committee Republicans are committed to scientifically-sound management and restoration of our nation’s forests. The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands should focus its efforts on advancing substantive policy that will equip our land managers with the tools needed to meaningfully scale-up responsible management of our forests, while also

¹ <https://www.iii.org/fact-statistic/facts-statistics-wildfires>

focusing on the dire need to restore and regenerate forest land that has been torched by catastrophic wildfires.

II. WITNESSES

- **Mr. Dave Daley**, Rancher, Butte County, California [*Republican Witness*]
- **Ms. Riva Duncan**, Executive Secretary, Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, Fire Staff Officer, U.S. Forest Service, Umpqua National Forest (Retired)
- **Dr. Beverly Law**, Professor Emeritus, Global Change Biology & Terrestrial Systems Science, Oregon State University
- **Dr. Courtney Schultz**, Associate Professor of Forest & Natural Resource Policy, Director of the Public Lands Policy Group, Department of Forest and Rangeland Stewardship, Colorado State University

III. BACKGROUND

Catastrophic Wildfire Crisis

The enormity of the wildfire crisis in the United States cannot be overstated. Over 68 million acres have burned in the last decade, and over 10 million acres burned in 2020 alone.² The root cause for this increased susceptibility is not warming temperatures, but the lack of proactive forest management in recent decades that have critically weakened U.S. forests. Many U.S. forests are overstocked, loaded with dangerous dry fuels that have been allowed to accumulate over decades of mismanagement. This overstocking makes forests more susceptible to the impacts of drought, disease and insect infestation by increasing competition among trees for the water, minerals and sunlight necessary to sustain a healthy forest.³

Forests have historically been carbon sinks, that capture significant amounts of carbon as they grow. However, in recent years, there has been a concerning shift, with many forests in the western United States now emitting more carbon than they capture.⁴ As trees mature, the rate that they capture carbon slows down and as the trees die and decompose, they release the carbon back into the atmosphere.⁵ The amount of carbon emitted by these unhealthy forests is further increased by the catastrophic wildfires that quicken the release of carbon.⁶ The wildfires in California alone

² <https://www.iii.org/fact-statistic/facts-statistics-wildfires>

³ Ingram, Robert G. "Robert G. Ingram: Forest Fuel Management - the Ugly Truth." *TheUnion.com*, October, 9, 2020, www.theunion.com/opinion/columns/robert-g-ingram-forest-fuel-management-the-ugly-truth/.

⁴ Murphy, Zoeann, and Chris Mooney. "Montana's Forests Have Swung from Pulling Carbon Dioxide out of the Air to Putting It Back Again." *The Washington Post*. January 29, 2019. Accessed January 31, 2019.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/gone-in-a-generation/forest-climate-change.html?utm_term=.8d7a6e691000.

⁵ O'Neil, Dr. Elaine. "Cut Trees to Save the Environment? – Who Knew." *Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities*. Accessed January 31, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/healthyforestshealthycommunities/videos/290559738314129/?__tn__=,d,P-R&eid=ARBUZgWqI7gqN3mlpbli0iJ7itV-11oVHdrHMcgqY8YUBoDhE5FgAqpMuusNI0QBz9cNCCpEk-ssB7Zu.

⁶ Malmsheimer, Robert W., Patrick Heffernan, Steve Brink, Douglas Crandall, Fred Deneke, Christopher Galik, Edmund Gee, John A. Helms, Nathan McClure, Michael Mortimer, Steve Ruddell, Matthew Smith, and John Stewart. "Forest Management Solutions for Mitigating Climate Change in the United States." *Journal of Forestry*, April/May 2008, 119. Accessed January 31, 2019. [https://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/uploads/399/Forest Management Solutions for Mitigating Climate Change.pdf](https://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/uploads/399/Forest%20Management%20Solutions%20for%20Mitigating%20Climate%20Change.pdf).

last year emitted roughly 112 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is equivalent to the emissions of 24.2 million passenger cars driving in a single year.⁷ When U.S. travel came to a near halt after COVID-19, the wildfires in California and Oregon alone wiped out all the resulting reduction in U.S. emissions reductions.⁸

While the environmental damage caused by wildfires is undeniable, the human cost is far worse. Since 2005, over 89,000 structures were destroyed by wildfires, leading to an untold number of deaths, and enormous personal losses.⁹ Entire towns have literally gone up in smoke. Just two years ago, the Camp fire in California destroyed over 18,000 structures and 85 people tragically lost their lives.¹⁰ The towns of Paradise and Concow were both essentially destroyed, losing over 95% of all structures.¹¹

Inadequate Response

The severe wildfire threat remains, with over 63 million acres of national forests remaining at high or very high risk of wildfire.¹² Due to a mix of bureaucratic red tape, onerous regulations and frivolous litigation, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is carrying out only 2 percent of needed fuel reduction treatments per year.¹³ At this paltry treatment pace, the USFS will not tackle its high-risk backlog, nor keep pace with additional problem areas, for several decades.¹⁴ Without a drastic change of course, we will continue to experience increasingly harmful fire seasons.

Far too often, Committee Democrats have ignored this simple truth. They have continued to push the false narrative that warming temperatures alone are responsible for the increasing vulnerability of our forests to catastrophic wildfire.¹⁵ While warming temperatures may have contributed to longer and more severe fire seasons, ignoring the clear need for more management reflects a blind commitment to extreme environmentalist ideology and a disregard for sound science and reality.

Path Forward

Radical environmental groups have worked hard to make the American people believe that active forest management is incompatible with science and will lead to the clear cutting of our nation's

⁷ "California's 2020 Wildfire Emissions Akin to 24 Million Cars." *Bloomberg Law*, news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/californias-2020-wildfire-emissions-akin-to-24-million-cars.

⁸ Dormido, Hannah, et al. "Smoke from Wildfires Wiped out the U.S. Pandemic-Related Clean Air Gains in 2020." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 17 Mar. 2021, www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2021/03/17/air-pollution-us-wildfires/.

⁹ Barrett, Kimiko. "Wildfires Destroy Thousands of Structures Each Year." *Headwaters Economics*, 4 Dec. 2020, headwaterseconomics.org/natural-hazards/structures-destroyed-by-wildfire/.

¹⁰ Press, Associated. "List of Missing in Camp Fire Down to 1." *FOX40*, FOX40, 2 Aug. 2019, fox40.com/news/california-connection/one-still-missing-in-camp-fire/.

¹¹ "Paradise Lost: Inside California's Camp Fire." *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, www.cbsnews.com/news/paradise-lost-inside-california-camp-fire-60-minutes/.

¹² Fretwell, Holly, and Jonathan Wood. "Fix America's Forests: Reforms to Restore National Forests and Tackle the Wildfire Crisis." *PERC*, 12 Apr. 2021, www.perc.org/2021/04/12/fix-americas-forests-reforms-to-restore-national-forests-and-tackle-the-wildfire-crisis/.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ "Is Global Warming Fueling Increased Wildfire Risks?" Union of Concerned Scientists. July 24, 2018. Accessed January 31, 2019. <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/science-and-impacts/impacts/global-warming-and-wildfire.html#.XFNV7apKiUl>.

forests.¹⁶ This willful misinformation campaign must not be allowed to go unchecked. Active forest management is not a radical idea, and it is indisputably supported by sound science.¹⁷

Active forest management encourages sustained healthy growth, while removing much of the dangerous fuels buildup that lead to catastrophic wildfires that destroy lives and property and emit enormous amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Healthy forests that are actively managed are carbon sinks that sequester carbon while continuing to enable healthy new growth that is more resilient to natural threats. Active forest management provides significant benefits to the environment, to the nearby communities, and to the economy.

Minimizing the severity of wildfires before they begin is an achievable goal if land managers use sound science to address the significant overgrowth in fire-prone lands and restore healthy forests at a far greater pace and scale. Committee Republicans are committed to this goal and will continue to push innovative solutions to restore health and resiliency to our nation's forests.

Republican Witness

The Republican witness for the hearing is Dave Daley, a cattle rancher from Butte County, who tragically lost a significant portion of his herd in the 2020 Bear Fire.¹⁸ Mr. Daley penned an impassioned op-ed about the tragedy that caught national attention.¹⁹ His family has been exemplary stewards of their land for 6 generations. His frustration with inaction on the wildfire crisis from the state and federal government is one shared by many in the rural communities who have been upended by catastrophic wildfires. Mr. Daley also teaches several courses at California State University, Chico, is the former President of the California Cattlemen's Association.

¹⁶ "Memo: House Farm Bill Forestry Title Potentially Disastrous for National Forests." *The Wilderness Society*, www.wilderness.org/articles/media-resources/memo-house-farm-bill-forestry-title-potentially-disastrous-national-forests#.

¹⁷ Locatelli, Bruno, and Emilia Pramova. "Forests and Adaptation to Climate Change: What Is at Stake?" *World Resources Institute* Emilia Pramova, 23 Sept. 2013, www.wri.org/our-work/project/world-resources-report/forests-and-adaptation-climate-change-what-stake.

¹⁸ <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-10-03/wildfire-killed-this-ranchers-cattle-and-changed-his-family-legacy-he-blames-politics>

¹⁹ <https://calcattlemen.org/2020/09/23/legacy/>