



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: Subcommittee on Federal Lands Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Federal Lands; Aniela Butler and Jason Blore –
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Date: April 28, 2025
Subject: Legislative Hearing on 4 Bills

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold a legislative hearing on 4 bills:

- H.R. 528 (Rep. Pettersen), “*Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025*”;
- H.R. 655 (Rep. Bentz), “*The Dalles Watershed Development Act*”;
- H.R. 1276 (Rep. Comer), To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky; and
- H.R. 2876 (Rep. Moore of UT), “*University of Utah Research Park Act*”.

The hearing will take place on **Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.** in room 1334 Longworth House Office Building.

Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez (Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, April 28, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- The legislation featured in this hearing offers commonsense solutions to right-size the federal estate by transferring land to local governments and removing burdensome deed restrictions that stifle development.
- Together, these bills also improve land management by empowering local officials to ensure greater water resiliency for their community, enhancing the growth opportunities of a beloved charity, and facilitating cutting-edge research and innovation.
- This hearing also includes legislation that will promote vital forest management and reforestation initiatives, which recently passed the House of Representatives as a component of the bipartisan H.R. 471, the “*Fix Our Forests Act*”

II. WITNESSES

PANEL I (Members of Congress):

- *To Be Announced*

PANEL II:

- **Ms. Ellen Shultzbarger**, Associate Deputy Chief – National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, D.C. [*H.R. 528 and H.R. 655*]

PANEL III:

- **The Honorable Richard Mays**, Mayor, The Dalles, Oregon [*H.R. 655*]
- **The Honorable George P. Bray**, Mayor, Paducah, Kentucky [*H.R. 1276*]
- **Mr. Taylor R. Randall**, President, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah [*H.R. 2876*]
- **Mr. Matthew M. McCombs**, State Forester and Director, Colorado State Forest Service, Fort Collins, Colorado [*H.R. 528*] [*Minority Witness*]

III. BACKGROUND

[H.R. 528 \(Rep. Pettersen\), “Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025”](#)



A USFS and Montana Department of Natural Resources post-burn restoration project.
Source: Nicky Ouellet, Montana Public Radio, 2018.

There is an urgent need to restore landscapes damaged by wildfire and other natural disasters. Since 2000, the United States has lost an average of 7 million acres per year to catastrophic wildfires, more than double the annual average lost during the 1990s.¹ Worse still, many of these catastrophic wildfires burn so severely that natural regeneration of the forest becomes impossible.² If these lands are not artificially regenerated (i.e., by planting trees), they will

eventually transition from forests to shrublands.³ In 2022, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) identified a 4-million-acre federal reforestation backlog, 80 percent of which is attributable to

¹ Anne A. Riddle, “Wildfire Statistics”, Congressional Research Service, June 1, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search&guid=b82a4d954677449b918a65ece823396f&index=0>.

² Associated Press, “Wildfires have decimated forests. Here’s why replanting trees is a challenge,” October 2, 2024, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91200307/wildfires-forests-replanting-trees-restoration-challenges>.

³ *Id.*

catastrophic wildfires.⁴ Yet, over the preceding decade, USFS only addressed less than 6 percent of its post-wildfire planting needs annually.⁵ Clearly, more needs to be done to tackle the reforestation backlog.⁶

In addition to wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters have also inflicted extensive damage on many of our nation's forests, resulting in an enormous loss of trees. In 2024, for example, Hurricane Helene ripped through the southeastern U.S., causing widespread devastation and flooding. Roughly a fifth of the region's federal forest land was severely damaged in the storm.⁷ According to the USFS, the destruction from that single hurricane extended for more than 200 miles through the southern Appalachians.⁸ Many of these areas remain in desperate need of reforestation and restoration work.

H.R. 528 is a bipartisan bill, led by Representatives Pettersen (D-CO-07) and Edwards (R-NC-11), that would require federal land management agencies to carry out priority reforestation projects using cooperative agreements and contracts with non-federal partners. Specifically, the legislation would require the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USFS, in coordination with states, Tribes, and local governments, to identify lands in critical need of rehabilitation post-natural disaster. The bill allows federal land managers to support projects through grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements. A similar proposal is included in the "*Fix Our Forests Act*," which passed the House of Representatives earlier this year in a strong, bipartisan vote.⁹

H.R. 655 (Rep. Bentz), "The Dalles Watershed Development Act"

Settled on the banks of the Columbia River, The Dalles is the largest city in northcentral Oregon's Wasco County.¹⁰ The city's residents rely on water stored in the nearby Crow Creek Reservoir, which is located in the Mt. Hood National Forest and sourced by South Fork Mill Creek.¹¹ This single reservoir provides 80 percent of the city's annual water supply for domestic and commercial use.¹² While the city owns much of the land occupied by the current reservoir, its dam, and the surrounding watershed, some sections extend onto adjacent USFS-managed land.¹³ The Dalles must apply for and receive a special use permit to access and maintain those portions of the municipal watershed that fall under the USFS's jurisdiction.¹⁴ However, the

⁴ U.S. Forest Service, "National Forest System: Reforestation Strategy: Growing and Nurturing Resilient Forests," July 2022, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reforestation-strategy.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ U.S. Forest Service, "American Forests Partners with USDA Forest Service to Expand Reforestation across National Forests", December 6, 2023, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/12/06/american-forests-partners-usda-forest-service-expand-reforestation>.

⁷ Simon Ducroquet, et al., "Where the trees once stood: See how Hurricane Helene wiped out North Carolina's forests", The Washington Post, November 9, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2024/hurricane-helene-forest-damage-north-carolina/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ H.R. 471, 119th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/471>.

¹⁰ Susan Buce, "The Dalles," The Oregon Encyclopedia, April 5, 2024, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/the_dalles/.

¹¹ Wasco County Watersheds, "The Dalles Watershed," accessed March 24, 2025, <https://www.wascowatersheds.org/the-dalles>.

¹² Congressman Bentz Introduces Legislation to Improve the City of The Dalles, January 30, 2025, <https://bentz.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-bentz-introduces-legislation-improve-city-dalles-water-security>

¹³ Per the map entitled, "The Dalles Conveyance Parcel A" and dated November 4, 2024. This map is on file with the Committee.

¹⁴ Tom Peterson, "TD watershed needs an Act of Congress in move against climate change," CCC News, January 25, 2025, <https://columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles/td-watershed-needs-an-act-of-congress-in-move-against-climate-change>.

USFS's special use permit imposes considerable administrative burdens and limits future operations, repairs, and expansions of the reservoir and its associated dam.

With its population expected to increase over the coming decades, The Dalles should expect a concomitant rise in its long-term water-resource needs.¹⁵ This means that the city must secure improved access to its watershed. Accordingly, city officials have discussed plans to increase the Crow Creek Reservoir's current capacity from 900 to 3,000 acre-feet.¹⁶ H.R. 655, introduced by Congressman Bentz (R-OR-02), provides a long-term solution to this problem by transferring approximately 150 acres of National Forest System lands that encompass the reservoir and its adjacent lands to city ownership. The conveyance of this parcel from the USFS to local hands would cut red tape by removing the recurring cost and administrative burden of abiding by the current special use permit. In fact, the City Manager of The Dalles estimated this bill would save the city at least \$150,000 in costs.¹⁷ Together, the provisions in this legislation would improve the efficiency of the Crow Creek Dam's current operation, support the growing city's water-management efforts, and reduce the federal estate.

H.R. 1276 (Rep. Comer), To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky.

For more than six decades, the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah (Club) has provided a safe and affordable environment in which the children of McCracken County can recreate and receive valuable mentorship.¹⁸ The Club's namesake, Oscar Cross, was a probation officer who sought to provide young people with a valuable education outside of a classroom setting.¹⁹



Paducah Boys and Girls Club in Paducah, Kentucky.

Source: WPSD News, 2024.

After seeing rapid growth in his original organization, Cross rebranded and received official affiliation with the Boys and Girls Club of America in 1953.²⁰ The federal government conveyed the Club's current site to the City of Paducah (City) through the National Park Service's (NPS's) Federal Lands to Parks Program, which allows communities to acquire surplus federal properties

¹⁵ Cole Goodwin, "Population Growth in The Dalles is Slowing But More Housing is Still Needed," CCC News, December 14, 2023, <https://columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles/population-growth-in-the-dalles-is-slowing-but-more-housing-is-still-needed>.

¹⁶ Tom Peterson, "TD watershed needs an Act of Congress in move against climate change," CCC News, January 25, 2025, <https://columbiacommunityconnection.com/the-dalles/td-watershed-needs-an-act-of-congress-in-move-against-climate-change>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah, "About Us", accessed April 21, 2025, <https://www.ocbg.club/about-us/>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

for parks and recreation.²¹ Under this program, nearly 184,000 acres of land have been transferred to state and local governments.²²

After decades of serving the community, the Club is pursuing a large-scale renovation to better serve its members, including the addition of new classrooms and a refurbished gym. The NPS still holds a deed restriction on the 3.62-acre parcel of land, preventing full ownership by the City and standing in the way of further development and improvements to the property.²³ For the renovation to occur, ownership of the parcel must be transferred from the City of Paducah to the Club, which can only be resolved by removing the remaining restriction that the NPS holds on the City's ownership.²⁴ H.R. 1276, led by Representative Comer (R-KY-01), would remove the NPS deed restriction on the parcel, giving the City full ownership of the property and the ability to promptly transfer the land to the Club. Crafted in collaboration with local stakeholders, H.R. 1276 would eliminate an unnecessary federal barrier to the Club's continued community investment and encourage new recreational and educational opportunities. Senator Paul (R-KY) is leading companion legislation in the Senate.²⁵

H.R. 2876 (Rep. Moore of UT), “University of Utah Research Park Act”

H.R. 2876 would release the federal government's reversionary interest in approximately 593 acres of non-federal land owned by the University of Utah. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) originally issued a patent for this land under the “Recreation and Public Purposes Act” to the University of Utah on October 18, 1968.²⁶ The patent specified that the land, located in Salt Lake City, could be used only for academic expansion, an arboretum, and a highway to access facilities used for those purposes.²⁷ Failing to adhere to the terms of the patent would trigger the reversionary interest, transferring the land back to the BLM.

In the intervening decades, the University of Utah developed the land, now known as Research Park, into a research and development center that serves both the university and the local workforce.²⁸ Research Park has helped over 100 start-ups, conceived mostly by University of Utah students and researchers.²⁹ The park currently hosts approximately 50 companies, 81 university departments, and a workforce of more than 14,000 people.³⁰ Among these are innovative companies specializing in biotechnology, pharmaceutical development, and

²¹ The Office of Congressman James Comer, “Comer Introduces Legislation to Remove Federal Government Restrictions on Paducah, Kentucky, Property,” February 13, 2025, <https://comer.house.gov/2025/2/comer-introduces-legislation-to-remove-federal-government-restrictions-on-paducah-kentucky-property>. National Park Service, Federal Lands to Parks Program, “Creating Local Parks and Recreation Since 1949”, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1508/index.htm>.

²² *Id.*

²³ Jeremiah Hatcher, “Comer talks Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club land transfer Bill”, The Paducah Sun, February 25, 2025, https://www.paducahsun.com/news/comer-talks-oscar-cross-boys-girls-club-land-transfer-bill/article_99479980-5501-58bd-86bc-a4053c84c38e.html.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ S. 601, 119th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/601/text?s=1&r=8>.

²⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, “Recreation and public Purposes Land Patent to the University of Utah” October 18, 1968, <https://d182hggomw8pjd.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2020/08/05141720/1968-10th-US-Grant-Land-Patent.pdf>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ The Office of Senator Mike Lee, “University of Utah Research Park Act,” November 2, 2021, https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/2021.11.3_Research_Park_continuation.pdf.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Brian Maffly, “U. has big plans for Research Park, but land patent is getting in the way,” The Salt Lake Tribune, December 15, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2021/12/15/u-has-big-plans-research/>.

manufacturing, all of which provide opportunities for students to learn and work among experts.³¹ This parcel has been used in this fashion by the University since the issuance of the patent and BLM has not been involved in the management of the land for more than 55 years. A recent review of Research Park uncovered that the parcel was not in compliance with the patent because of the commercial nature of the companies currently located there. Unfortunately, the restrictive terms of the reversionary clause mean that the University cannot continue to host these companies, despite the considerable educational and economic benefits they provide to students and the broader community.³²

Sponsored by Representative Moore (R-UT-01), H.R. 2876 would authorize the release of the reversionary interest in the land to the University of Utah, allowing for the activities at Research Park to continue. This bill would also enable the university to move forward with its plans to enhance the area further by making it more walkable, creating additional residential facilities, and bringing in additional laboratories and offices.³³ Senator Lee (R-UT) is the sponsor of the companion legislation in the Senate.³⁴

IV. MAJOR PROVISIONS & SECTION-BY-SECTION

H.R. 528 (Rep. Pettersen), “Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025”

Section 2. Post Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Program

- Requires the Secretary of the Interior to identify lands that require reforestation and restoration due to unplanned disturbances and that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance.
- Requires the Secretary to propose a list of priority projects for reforestation and restoration to be completed each fiscal year and carry out those projects through grants or cooperative agreements.
- Directs the Secretary to consult or coordinate with State and local governments, Tribes, institutions of higher education, and other land management agencies with adjacent land.
- Requires the Secretary to report, no later than two years after the bill’s enactment and annually thereafter, to Congress on all land requiring reforestation and the progress made on priority restoration projects.

H.R. 655 (Rep. Bentz), “The Dalles Watershed Development Act”

Section 3. The Dalles Conveyance.

- Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to convey a 150-acre parcel of National Forest System land in the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles, Oregon, should the city submit a written request for conveyance within one year of enactment of the law. The conveyance will be made subject to valid existing rights and without consideration.

³¹ The Office of Sen. Mike Lee, “University of Utah Research Park Act,” Staff, November 2, 2021, https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/2021.11.3_Research_Park_continuation.pdf.

³² *Id.*

³³ Tony Semerad, “University of Utah plans major revamp of research park on Foothill Drive, adding lots of housing,” The Salt Lake Tribune, June 9, 2020, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2020/06/09/dense-walkable-amenity/>.

³⁴ S. 1453; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/1453>.

- Stipulates terms and conditions of the conveyance, including the map and legal description of the land, surveys, and administrative costs.

H.R. 1276 (Rep. Comer), To remove restrictions from a parcel of land in Paducah, Kentucky.

Section 1. Removal of Restriction.

- Directs the Secretary of the Interior to remove all deed restrictions from a 3.62-acre parcel of land conveyed to the City of Paducah, Kentucky, by the NPS on April 7, 2012.

H.R. 2876 (Rep. Moore of UT), “University of Utah Research Park Act”

Section 2. Confirmation of use of certain non-federal land in Salt Lake City, Utah, for valid public purposes.

- Clarifies that the University of Utah’s current use of approximately 593 acres of land, subject to a reversionary interest, as a research park is a valid public purpose consistent with the requirements of the “Recreation and Public Purposes Act.”³⁵
- Confirms that any other uses of the land in question that are consistent with its use as a research park or related university purpose, including student housing or transit hub development, are also valid public purposes consistent with the requirements of the “Recreation and Public Purposes Act.”

V. COST

During the 117th Congress, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the Senate companion legislation of the “University of Utah Research Park Act” would not affect direct spending or revenues.³⁶ None of the other bills included in the hearing have received a formal cost estimate from CBO.

VI. ADMINISTRATION POSITION

The administration’s position is unknown at this time.

VII. EFFECT ON CURRENT LAW (RAMSEYER)

None of the bills featured in this hearing would change existing law.

³⁵ 43 U.S.C. 869 et seq.

³⁶ Congressional Budget Office, “Legislation Ordered Reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources: Estimated Budgetary Effects and Mandates Information,” November 21, 2022, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-11/s3370table_SenENR.pdf.