



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**  
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

**To:** House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members  
**From:** Subcommittee on Federal Lands – Aniela Butler and Brandon Miller  
([Aniela@mail.house.gov](mailto:Aniela@mail.house.gov) and [Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov](mailto:Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov); x6-7736)  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 4, 2024  
**Subject:** Oversight Hearing on “*Examining the President’s FY 2025 Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service*”

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The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “*Examining the President’s FY 2025 Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service*” on **Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at 10:15 a.m. in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez ([Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov](mailto:Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov)) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, June 3, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

## **I. KEY MESSAGES**

- Despite receiving billions of dollars in recent years, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is still struggling to confront the myriad challenges facing the agency, most notably the historic wildfire crisis that has destroyed lives and property, degraded air and water quality, and irreparably damaged millions of acres of wildlife habitat.
- The USFS budget once again fails to address systemic impediments to addressing the wildfire crisis, while seeking significant increases in funding. Burdensome regulations and frivolous litigation remain the primary obstacles blocking better forest management outcomes.
- This hearing will provide an opportunity to hold the USFS accountable and get answers on the agency’s plans to confront our nation’s wildfire crisis, increase timber production, improve forest health, reduce the deferred maintenance backlog, and address the effects of Biden’s border security failures on our nation’s forests.

## **II. WITNESSES**

- **Mr. Randy Moore**, Chief, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

## **III. BACKGROUND**

*Budget Overview* – Chief Randy Moore will be appearing before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands to discuss the Biden administration’s fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The USFS’s FY 2025 budget requests \$8.9 billion in discretionary funding (including roughly \$2.4 billion for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund), which reflects a \$658 million increase over FY 2024 enacted levels.<sup>1</sup> The USFS manages 193

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands, including 154 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands across 9 USFS Regions.<sup>2</sup> Most of these lands are located in our western states. The USFS manages more federal land in the eastern United States than all the other land management agencies combined.<sup>3</sup> Under the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act, NFS lands are to be managed for timber production, outdoor recreation, energy and mineral development, livestock grazing, watershed protection, and wildlife habitat.<sup>4</sup> Every year, NFS lands host roughly 159 million visitors, contributing about \$15.2 billion to the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>5</sup>

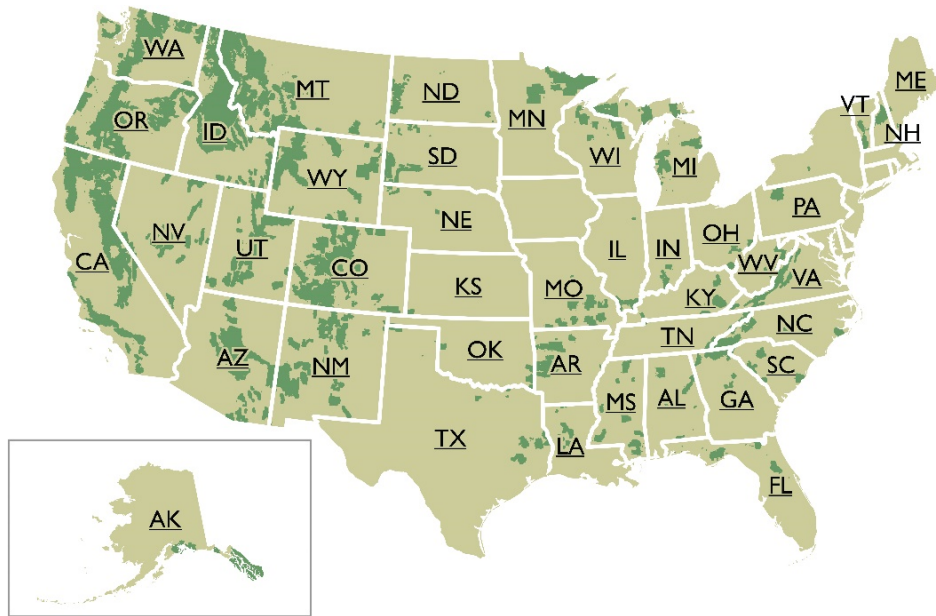
Discretionary Account	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Estimated	FY 2025 Request	Change Between FY 2024 and FY 2025
Wildland Fire Management	\$2.116 billion	\$2.116 billion	\$2.55 billion	+\$434 million
National Forest System	\$1.974 billion	\$1.974 billion	\$2.007 billion	+\$33 million
Capital Improvement and Maintenance	\$158.05 million	\$158.05 million	\$158 million	-\$48,000
Forest and Rangeland Research	\$307 million	\$307 million	\$315 million	+\$8 million
State, Private, and Tribal Forestry	\$337 million	\$337 million	\$305 million	-\$32 million
Forest Service Operations	\$1.152 billion	\$1.152 billion	\$1.187 billion	+\$25 million
Land Acquisition	\$814,000	\$814,000	\$814,000	-
Other Appropriations	\$3.6 million	\$2.8 million	\$4.8 million	+\$2 million
<b>Total (Discretionary)</b>	<b>\$6.05 billion</b>	<b>\$6.05 billion</b>	<b>\$6.5 billion</b>	<b>+\$450 million</b>
Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund	\$2.21 billion	\$2.21 billion	\$2.39 billion	+\$180 million
<b>Total (Discretionary + Reserve Fund)</b>	<b>\$8.26 billion</b>	<b>\$8.26 billion</b>	<b>\$8.9 billion</b>	<b>+\$658.5 million</b>

<sup>2</sup> Katie Hoover, *et al.*, “Federal Lands and Related Resources: Overview and Selected Issues for the 118th Congress,” Congressional Research Service, February 24, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R43429>. U.S. Forest Service, “Forest Service Regions”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/regions/index.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup> Katie Hoover & Anne A. Riddle, “National Forest System Management: Overview and Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, May 18, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43872>.

<sup>4</sup> 16 U.S.C. § 52.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.



USFS managed lands. **Source:** United States Geological Survey, no date.

*Wildfire Crisis* – Since 2000, over 164 million acres have been damaged by wildfire in the U.S., a collective area that is roughly three times the size of the entire state of Utah.<sup>6</sup> Prior to 2015, the United States never had more than 10 million acres burn in a single wildfire season. In the past decade, however, the country has now hit that ominous mark three times during the

worst wildfire seasons on record (2015, 2017, and 2020).<sup>7</sup> This crisis has wreaked havoc on landscapes and communities across the western United States. Catastrophic wildfires destroyed lives and property, degraded air and water quality, and irreparably damaged millions of acres of wildlife habitat. This year, more than 1.86 million acres have burned, largely in Texas and Oklahoma during February wildfires.<sup>8</sup> Historically, the USFS has carried out only 2 million acres of treatments per year.<sup>9</sup> At this disappointing rate, it would take the USFS over 30 years to treat the estimated 63 million acres of NFS land at risk for wildfire.<sup>10</sup>

Despite receiving roughly \$11.5 billion from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the USFS has failed to meaningfully ramp up the number of acres treated.<sup>11</sup> In fact, for the second year in a row, the USFS budget proposes treating *fewer* acres than the year prior. The FY 2025 budget seeks \$207 million for hazardous fuels reduction, consistent with the FY 2024 enacted amount.<sup>12</sup> Although the request for funding is constant, the USFS treatment goal for FY 2025 is 4 million acres, or 200,000 acres less than the previous year’s target.<sup>13</sup> This puts the agency off by roughly 2 million acres *from their own estimates* regarding how much land needs to be treated in the 10-year “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis” Strategy.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> NIFC, “Wildfires and Acres,” <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> National Interagency Fire Center, “National Fire News,” <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/nfn>.

<sup>9</sup> PERC, “Does Environmental Review Worsen the Wildfire Crisis,” Eric Edwards, Sara Sutherland, June 14, 2022, <https://perc.org/2022/06/14/does-environmental-review-worsen-the-wildfire-crisis/>.

<sup>10</sup> Katie Hoover & Anne A. Riddle, “Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020),” October 28, 2020, CRS, R46583, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46583>.

<sup>11</sup> P.L. 117-58. P.L. 117-169.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> QFR Response to Chairman Westerman, April 1, 2024, on file with the Committee.

Year	Acres Treated
FY 2017	2.75 million
FY 2018	3.40 million
FY 2019	2.90 million
FY 2020	2.65 million
FY 2021	3.70 million
FY 2022	3.21 million
FY 2023	4.3 million
<i>FY 2024 (target)</i>	<i>4.20 million</i>
<i>FY 2025 (target)</i>	<i>4.0 million</i>

**Source:** Data compiled by HNRC Majority Staff from USFS Budget Justifications, FY 2017-FY 2025.

Even this lackluster target is likely inflated, though, as the budget fails to address investigative reporting that uncovered the USFS has overstated its treatment numbers by more than 20 percent.<sup>15</sup> The discrepancy stems from the USFS recording multiple treatments (i.e., mechanical thinning, prescribed burning, chipping and piling, etc.) on the same acre separately as if multiple acres had been treated.

The House Committee on Natural Resources has advanced legislation to address inaccurate reporting of treated acres by USFS. H.R. 1567, introduced by Subcommittee on Federal Lands Chairman Tom Tiffany (R-WI), requires the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of the Interior to submit accurate

reports regarding hazardous fuels reduction activity and implement standardized procedures for tracking data related to such activities. The legislation was reported by the Committee on Natural Resources by unanimous consent on April 28, 2023, and was passed by the House of Representatives by a vote of 406 to 4 on September 13, 2023.

*Wildland Fire Management* – As wildfire seasons have grown in both length and severity, so too have wildland fire management costs. In the last decade, suppression costs averaged over \$3 billion per year across the federal land management agencies.<sup>16</sup> The FY 2025 budget proposes \$2.6 billion for Wildland Fire Management activities, an increase of \$433 million from the FY 2024 enacted level.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the FY 2025 budget proposes shifting more than half of that total—approximately \$1.3 billion designated for wildfire pre-suppression and suppression activities and firefighter salaries—from base discretionary to emergency funding.<sup>18</sup> In so doing, the FY 2025 budget would free up base discretionary funding for pet projects of the Biden Administration, including the purchase of zero-emission vehicles and associated charging infrastructure.<sup>19</sup> This budgetary gimmick would divert funding from necessary wildfire management activities and appears to be an attempted evasion of effective congressional oversight and responsible budgeting practices.

<sup>15</sup> NBC News, “The Forest Service is overstating its wildfire prevention progress to Congress despite decades of warning not to”, Adiel Kaplan, Monica Hersher, August 9, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/forest-service-overstating-wildfire-prevention-progress-congress-decad-rcna41576>.

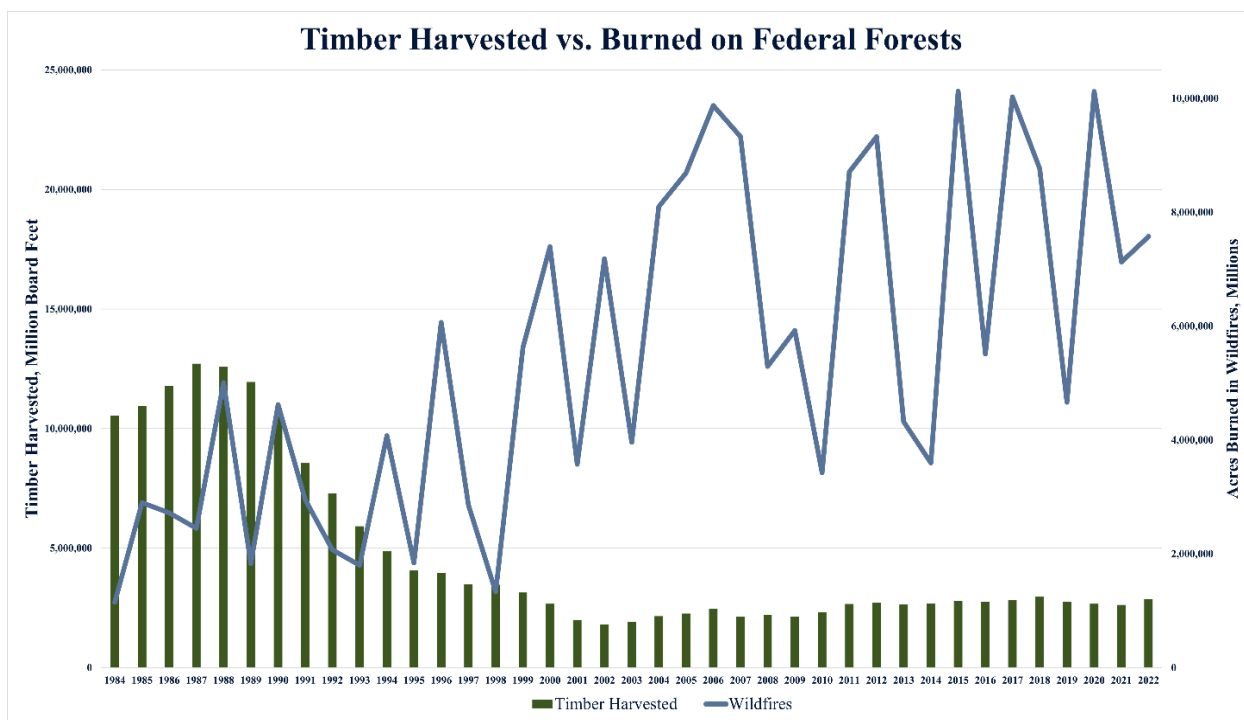
<sup>16</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Economic risks: Forest Service estimates costs of fighting wildfires in a hotter future”, Sarah Farmer and Jenni Moore Myers, May 14, 2024, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/economic-risks-forest-service-estimates-costs-fighting-wildfires-hotter-future#:~:text=Wildfire%20suppression%20is%20costly..than%20%243%20billion%20per%20year>.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

*Timber Targets* – The USFS failed to hit its timber target in FY 2024 by roughly 260 million board feet, selling only 3.143 billion board feet (BBF).<sup>20</sup> Concerningly, the USFS lowered its timber target from 3.4 BBF to 3.2 BBF for the next two years.<sup>21</sup> This troubling trajectory for treatment and timber targets casts doubt on the USFS’s wildfire risk reduction efforts and reflects an ongoing threat to sawmill infrastructure. Since 2000, over 1,500 sawmills, or roughly one-third of the total number of sawmills in operation at that time, have closed or curtailed capacity.<sup>22</sup> The loss of this critically important infrastructure and mill capacity greatly hampers efforts to process hazardous fuels, thus exacerbating the wildfire crisis. A lack of reliable federal timber is consistently cited as a primary cause behind numerous mill closures in western states with large amounts of federal land. Just last month, in April 2024, C&D Lumber, which began operations in southern Oregon in 1890, announced its permanent closure, citing “timber supply issues” among other challenges, that “have made it impossible for us to envision a sustainable future for the company.”<sup>23</sup>



Source: House Natural Resources Committee, 2023.

Without a stable supply of timber, investments in new sawmills, which often cost more than \$100 million, make little sense for private industry.<sup>24</sup> The FY 2025 Budget includes \$43 million to support Forest Products, and the USFS has continued to emphasize its support to expand markets for through Wood Innovations grants. Last year, USFS used \$48 million to fund 104

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> Congressional Budget Office, “Wildfires”, June 2022, <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58212>.

<sup>23</sup> KQEN News Radio, “C&D Lumber Announces Permanent Closure”, April 5, 2024, <https://kqennewsradio.com/2024/04/05/cd-lumber-announces-permanent-closure/>.

<sup>24</sup> The Advocate, “More than half a billion investment in sawmills planned across Louisiana amid higher lumber prices”, Kristen Mosbrucker, July 26, 2021, [https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/business/more-than-half-a-billion-investment-in-sawmills-planned-across-louisiana-amid-higher-lumber-prices/article\\_600c8bac-ee3e-11eb-8075-cbf03f7e098e.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/business/more-than-half-a-billion-investment-in-sawmills-planned-across-louisiana-amid-higher-lumber-prices/article_600c8bac-ee3e-11eb-8075-cbf03f7e098e.html).

Wood Innovations projects focused on expanding wood products and markets.<sup>25</sup> While innovative uses for wood products are an important pursuit, they are not a replacement for the Forest Service’s need to do a better job harvesting timber resources to meet the market’s current demands.

*Wildfire Prevention Studies* – Despite heightened federal expenditures on suppression activities, wildfires continue to increase in size and severity across the U.S.<sup>26</sup> Investments in wildfire prevention, including through scientific studies of at-risk landscapes, are a crucial step toward addressing the growing crisis.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the USFS FY 2025 budget request, while proposing significant funding increases for other budget items, misses opportunities to sustain needed prevention efforts. The Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP), for example, “provides funding and science delivery for scientific studies associated with managing wildland fire, fuels, and fire-impacted ecosystems to respond to emerging needs of wildland fire and land managers, practitioners, and policymakers from local to national levels.”<sup>28</sup> As such, the JFSP aims to function as a “primary clearinghouse” for cutting-edge “fire science information and activities throughout the nation.”<sup>29</sup> Although this program promises many prevention-related benefits, the USFS proposes to cut funding for the JFSP for FY 2025.<sup>30</sup>

*State, Private, and Tribal Forestry* – Wildfires do not respect manmade boundaries, so collaboration with states, tribes, local communities, and other stakeholders is critical. The State, Private, and Tribal Forestry organization within the USFS facilitates much of this cross-boundary work.<sup>31</sup> This organization provides resources and assistance to non-federal stakeholders, focusing on improving forest health and protecting communities from wildfires.<sup>32</sup> The FY 2025 budget decreases that account by roughly \$32 million, dropping by \$305 million below FY 2024.<sup>33</sup>

*Reforestation* – In addition to addressing existing wildfire threats, there is a clear need to restore previous landscapes damaged by wildfire. In the last 20 years, the United States lost an average of 7 million acres per year to catastrophic wildfires, more than double the average seen during the 1990’s.<sup>34</sup> Many of these catastrophic wildfires burn so severely that natural regeneration is impossible. If these lands are not artificially regenerated (i.e., by planting trees), the lands will eventually transition from forests to shrublands. In total, the USFS identified a 4 million-acre reforestation backlog, 80 percent of which is related to catastrophic wildfires.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately,

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>. *uyk*

<sup>26</sup> Jessica Blackband, “Firefighting Workforce Benefits From FY25 Budget Request But Sustained Investments Are Necessary To Address The Wildfire Crisis,” Federation of American Scientists, April 16, 2024, <https://fas.org/publication/fy25-wildfire-budget/>.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “State, Private, and Tribal Forestry”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/state-private-forestry>

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Wildfire Statistics”, Katie Hoover, June 1, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search&guid=b82a4d954677449b918a65eccc823396f&index=0>.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Reforestation Strategy,” July 2022, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf).

the agency has only addressed less than 6 percent of its post-wildfire planting needs annually.<sup>36</sup> The IJA removed the \$30 million cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF), which receives funds from the collection of tariffs on certain wood-product imports to fund reforestation efforts on public lands.<sup>37</sup> The USFS budget notes that collections decreased to \$158 million from \$261 million in FY 2024.<sup>38</sup> The budget seeks \$140 million to increase “organizational capacity in nursery, genetics, and reforestation programs.”<sup>39</sup>

Even though the USFS is requesting additional money for reforestation, the agency’s reforested acreage target is lowered in the FY 2025 budget. The USFS aims to complete roughly 1.8 million acres of reforestation over the next ten years.<sup>40</sup> Despite the considerable increase in funding through the RTF, this reforestation goal is a decrease from before the cap was removed when the agency was averaging reforestation on 190,000 acres annually.<sup>41</sup> More needs to be done to address the estimated 4-million-acre reforestation backlog.<sup>42</sup> Further, while reforestation is an important component of healthy forest management, failing to properly thin and manage forests and utilize wood products will mean that replanted trees will add fuel to future wildfires.

*Wildland Firefighter Pay* – The IJA provided \$600 million to increase the base firefighter salary by \$20,000 (or 50 percent of their current salary, whichever is lesser).<sup>43</sup> Under the IJA, \$480 million of this increase was for the USFS wildland firefighters, while \$120 million was for the Department of the Interior (DOI).<sup>44</sup> Congress has extended this pay increase four times, and the current extension will last through the end of FY 2024.<sup>45</sup> To address wildland firefighter pay, the USFS FY 2025 budget includes \$2.6 billion for Wildland Fire Management Activities, a \$433 million increase from the FY 2024 level.<sup>46</sup> The budget also includes \$216 million for a permanent pay increase for wildland firefighters.<sup>47</sup> An increase of \$69 million is requested for cost of living adjustments, and \$136 million to increase Federal firefighting capacity.<sup>48</sup> Finally, this budget seeks a \$10 million investment to support health and wellbeing services for wildland firefighters.<sup>49</sup>

Brave wildland firefighters, who routinely put their safety and lives on the line to protect vulnerable communities, undoubtedly deserve fair compensation. Unfortunately, the USFS has

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<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Reforestation Strategy,” July 2022,

[https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “American Forests Partners with USDA Forest Service to Expand Reforestation across National Forests”, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/12/06/american-forests-partners-usda-forest-service-expand-reforestation>.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Update: Wildland firefighter pay, classification in infrastructure law”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/wildland-firefighter-pay-classification-infrastructure-law>.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “March 2024 firefighter pay, series update”, March 25, 2024, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/firefighter-pay>.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

consistently failed to transparently account for salaries and expenses, complicating this issue. The FY 2025 budget fails once again to identify an offset for any pay increases and suggests in numerous instances that the agency may not even have enough money to pay normal salaries. For example, the budget frequently states: “*The Forest Service will need to rely on other funding sources for Salaries and Expenses and balance hiring actions and attrition rates to stay within appropriations in the operational year.*”<sup>50</sup> The budget does not provide any further analysis to accompany this vague statement, causing confusion about whether the agency may need to request supplemental funds to continue normal operations. This curious lack of detail compounds previous concerns raised by Congress that the USFS had inaccurately asserted wildland firefighters would face a pay cut when the agency had over \$100 million remaining to pay firefighter salaries.<sup>51</sup>

*Old Growth and Mature Forests* – In April 2022, President Biden issued Executive Order 14072, directing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and DOI to define, identify, and inventory “mature and old growth forests” on public lands and subsequently develop policies to protect those forests.<sup>52</sup> The interagency mature and old growth initiative began in July 2022 with a Federal Register Notice and public comment period, resulting in roughly 4,000 comments and more than 100,000 signatures on various form letters from across the country.<sup>53</sup> In April 2023, the USFS published an “initial draft” seeking to define and inventory “old-growth and mature forests” and even convened a “Definition Development Team.”<sup>54</sup> Yet all these efforts have failed to create a single, coherent definition for “old-growth” or “mature” forests. This is a predictable shortcoming, as no standard definition exists for “old-growth forests” and “mature forests,” and they are not terms recognized in the scientific practice of forestry. Despite this lack of clear definitions, the report identified 91 million acres of “old-growth and mature” forested lands on NFS lands, comprising 63 percent of all land managed by the USFS.<sup>55</sup>

The Biden administration ultimately admitted that “these ‘definitions’ are considered dynamic, not static, and thus are subject to refinement as new information is incorporated (working definitions).”<sup>56</sup> Despite lacking a real definition, the administration released an introductory report in January that identified wildfire, insects, and diseases as the leading threats to mature and old-growth forests and even admitted that “tree cutting” is a minor threat that generally

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<sup>50</sup> *Id.* 291-37.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Catenacci, “Biden admin caught pushing misleading narrative on dire budget warnings impacting firefighters, data shows,” Fox News, September 22, 2023,

<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-admin-caught-pushing-misleading-narrative-dire-budget-firefighters-data>.

<sup>52</sup> Executive Office of the President [Joseph Biden]. Executive Order 14072, “Strengthening the Nation’s Forests, Communities, and Local Economies.” April 20, 2023. 87 F.R. 24851,

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-04-27/pdf/2022-09138.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, “Request for Information (RFI) on Federal Old-growth and Mature Forests”, July 15, 2024, 87 FR 42493,

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/07/15/2022-15185/request-for-information-rfi-on-federal-old-growth-and-mature-forests>.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, “Mature and Old-Growth Forests: Definition, Identification, and Initial Inventory on Lands Managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management”, April 2023,

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/mature-and-old-growth-forests-tech.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*



“improved or maintained” the stands that had been managed.<sup>57</sup> Continuing this misguided and incomplete effort, the USFS published a Notice of Intent to amend all 128 national forest land management plans to provide direction on how to manage, conserve, and steward old-growth forest conditions.<sup>58</sup> A draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected this summer, and the amendment process is expected to be completed in early 2025.<sup>59</sup> This misguided effort has unquestionably diverted time and energy away from addressing the overwhelming wildfire crisis that is the true threat to forest stands of every age class. This forest plan amendment process to protect so-called “old growth forests” poses serious threats to forest health and multiple use management. Committee Republicans are continuing to fight against this unnecessary and unhelpful endeavor.

*30x30 Initiative and Locking Up Lands* – The Biden administration continues to conduct orchestrated attacks on public lands, using a variety of tools to further the 30x30 agenda. These preservationist policies limit access, hurt local economies, and remove uses of public lands that benefit Americans. The Biden budget continues to support the 30x30 Initiative, including through several references in the USFS budget.<sup>60</sup> On May 6, 2021, the USDA and other federal departments released an “interim” report titled “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful,” which outlined a 10-year campaign to preserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.<sup>61</sup> In this report, the administration proposed an American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas. Nearly three years later, the administration finally published this atlas, even though the USFS has already been implementing 30x30 without clear goals or definitions and in whatever manner it considers convenient on any given day.<sup>62</sup> For instance, the decision to lock-up roughly 16.7 million acres under roadless restrictions in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska has been highlighted as an advancement for 30x30. Likewise, the misguided 225,000-acre mineral withdrawal in the Superior National Forest in Minnesota was touted as a win for the so-called “America the Beautiful Initiative.” These measures continually threaten working lands, private landowners, and multiple uses of land.

*Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA)* – Since the passage of the GAOA in 2020, the USFS received up to \$285 million from the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) each year to address the deferred maintenance backlog.<sup>63</sup> Despite this significant investment, the USFS’s deferred maintenance backlog increased from \$5.22 billion in FY 2019

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<sup>57</sup> U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, “Analysis of Threats to Mature and Old-Growth Forests on Lands Managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, January 2024, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/MOG-Threats-Intro.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/MOG-Threats-Intro.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System, December 20, 2023, 88 FR 88042, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/12/20/2023-27875/land-management-plan-direction-for-old-growth-forest-conditions-across-the-national-forest-system>.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “National Old-Growth Amendment”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/old-growth-forests/amendment#:~:text=The%20National%20Old%20Growth%20Amendment,to%20rapidly%20changing%20climate%20conditions>.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *et al.*, “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful,” 2021, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas, launched April 19, 2024, <https://www.conservation.gov/pages/atlas-and-data>.

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “FAQs- Great American Outdoors Act”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/gaoa/faqs>.

to over \$7.66 billion in FY 2022.<sup>64</sup> While this increase is not as large as those experienced by agencies like the National Park Service, it still represents an astonishing 47 percent increase over a relatively short period. The FY 2025 budget requests \$285 million for 89 LRF projects. Of this amount, \$33.86 million is for administrative and contingency funds, which will do nothing to reduce the maintenance backlog.<sup>65</sup>

The FY 2025 budget request also includes \$218 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which covers \$123.8 million for land acquisition and \$94.2 million for the Forest Legacy Program.<sup>66</sup> Last year, the USFS acquired over 46,000 acres of land.<sup>67</sup> Despite this permanent and mandatory funding stream, the discretionary USFS budget continues to carry a specific line item for land acquisition above LWCF funding. Adding new acres to the federal estate for the USFS to manage while the agency's deferred maintenance backlog steadily rises will only exacerbate existing maintenance challenges.

*Biden Border Crisis* – The Biden Border Crisis is harming USFS lands, primarily through the illegal cultivation of narcotics on USFS lands by drug cartels. The USFS reported that 5,801 illegal cannabis cultivation sites were detected on NFS lands during the 2011-2022 period.<sup>68</sup> While data is limited, the USFS estimated that it had removed 381,510 pounds of trash, 479 miles of plastic irrigation lines, and 228 containers of banned and illegal pesticides from these illegal cultivation sites over a roughly 20-year period.<sup>69</sup> This illegal cultivation also sparked wildfires that burned over 265,000 acres.<sup>70</sup> The USFS estimated that illegal marijuana cultivation on National Forest System lands earns cartels an estimated \$56 million to \$91 million annually.<sup>71</sup> Even the USFS's own budget documents acknowledge that the agency has historically been “underestimating the threat of this activity on Federal public lands” and only capturing a mere fraction of the illicit activity occurring on NFS lands.<sup>72</sup> For example, the USFS used new technology to survey a mere four percent of three National Forests and found 136 cultivation sites.<sup>73</sup> Of these sites, 77 had gone completely undetected over the previous 20 years.<sup>74</sup> Despite the promise of this new technology, the budget does not specifically ask for any related increases to address President Biden's border crisis. In fact, the only increases related to border enforcement are for updated vehicles. With each officer of the USFS's Law Enforcement and Investigations program patrolling, on average, a sprawling 370,000 acres of NFS lands,<sup>75</sup> investments in enforcement technology and personnel are sorely needed.

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<sup>64</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2013-FY2022 Estimates and Issues” Carol Hardy Vincent, August 8, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43997>.

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*

<sup>68</sup> Response to questions for the record submitted by Chairman Westerman. On file with the Committee.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.* Pg. 29a-109.

<sup>74</sup> *Id.* Pg. 29a-109.

<sup>75</sup> *Id.* Pg. 29a-108.