Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to join my colleagues in speaking about the danger the Mountain Bark beetle poses to the health of our Western forests.

I was backpacking four summers ago with my fly rod and sleeping bag in Idaho's spectacular Seven Devils Wilderness high above Hells Canyon, the deepest gorge in North America. These soaring peaks, where snow lasts well into August, are the home to the Whitebark Pine, a gnarly, slow growing evergreen which is my state's highest and toughest native tree species. It was still summer, yet many of the pine trees were yellow and dropping their needles. On closer examination, their trunks and limbs were riddled with tiny open holes—marks recently left by thousands of hatching bark beetles flying off to mate and lay their eggs on those neighboring trees still alive. In the 4 days I spent hiking over mountain passes from lake to lake stalking native cutthroat trout, I examined tree after tree—and found none that were

not dead or dying. At lower elevations the tree and bark beetle species are slightly different, but the results are the same. Dead and dying forests`

There are over 20 million acres of national forest in my state. They anchor a major part of Idaho's tourism economy and supply raw material for lumber, construction and renewable energy. Millions of additional acres are in state and private ownership.

Bark beetles are currently wreaking havoc on our healthy forests, damaging our state's economy, and increasing the risk and intensity of stand replacement wild fire. The epidemic threatens to impact Idaho's vital watersheds, key wildlife habitats, destroy old-growth forests and impact popular recreation areas. National Forest Supervisors and private landowners are desperately seeking solutions to an increasingly serious situation.

The cause of this epidemic is increasing drought and warmer winters which, in combination, can cause a thousand fold increase in the intensity of bark beetle infestations. In recent years climate change has brought longer drier summers, which reduce a tree's ability to drown bark beetle larva and less extreme winter cold temperatures which kill bark beetle pupae. Bark beetles can now can produce two generations in one summer and overwhelm entire forests instead of isolated trees. Whole mountainsides that used to be full of lush trees have turned brown--and ready to burn.

I worked in the forest products industry for over two decades and know that, outside of protected roadless and Wilderness areas, we need proactive forest management to restore our forests to a more healthy condition and reduce the threat to communities from raging wildfire.

Restorative forestry, including thinning of mature and overgrown stands and replacement of forest monocultures with a variety of species and maturities, will help repel future beetle attacks. Healthier ecosystems also provide economic and social benefits to both urban and rural communities, including better hunting, increased jobs in the woods, more logs for sawmills, forest residue for green energy co-generation plants, clean water and improved wildlife habitat.

Earlier this year, I introduced an amendment to HR 1404, the FLAME Act, to help protect Idahoans and their communities from some of the dangers caused by the bark beetle. The bill with my amendment passed unanimously and directs new emergency funding to address land management costs posed by catastrophic wildfires including those caused by beetle infestation. Passage of this amendment, together with the FLAME Act, will help forested states like mine return to healthier and more productive forests.

It’s time to act.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.