My name is Phil Rigdon and I am the Vice-President of the Intertribal Timber Council. I am also the Natural Resources Director for the Yakama Nation in Washington State.

Tribal nations maintain a vested interest in our forest resources because they hold our first foods, medicines, and are spiritually and culturally significant to our way of life. They also provide a valuable economic return to both tribal and surrounding communities. Countless generations of our ancestors have utilized these same lands and it is our responsibility to care for it for future generations. We should also recognize that fire, both natural and human caused are part of fire adapted ecosystems across this country. We need to re-learn how to live with and use fire for the benefit of our people and communities.

Of course, fire should only be prescribed when forest, fuel, and weather conditions allow for post fire effects that are similar to what historically happened based on forest type. As the original stewards of this land, Tribal people understand this better than anyone. Because forest conditions in many parts of the country are drastically departed from historic conditions, mechanical treatment may be needed first before it is appropriate to re-introduce fire into a forest ecosystem. However, the current model where suppression is the primary focus has not worked for at least the last two decades. We consistently see a very small percentage of fire starts burning the vast majority of all acres every year, typically under the worst burning conditions. Because most of these acres are burned on the hottest, driest, windiest days we see post fire effects that are significantly worse than what tribal people experienced prior to colonization.

Indian forests and their management, under the directive of the National Indian Forest Resources Management Act 1990, are reviewed by an independent scientific panel every ten years. For the fourth time since 1994, the Indian Forest Management Assessment Team (IFMAT) is currently generating a report to Congress. In the past, the IFMAT report shows that Tribes are suffering from chronic underfunding and challenges created by the loss of leadership and staffing. On the other, it also shows significant progress being made on tribal forests.

Nevertheless, tribes are efficient in the use of scarce resources to prepare our forests for fire, recover after fire and ensure the continuity of forest resources for generations to come.

On a total of 334 reservations in 36 states, 18.6 million acres of forests and woodlands are held in trust by the United States and managed for the benefit of Indians. Pursuant to both tribal direction and federal law, our forests must be sustainably managed. Indian Tribes in several states have instituted programs in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including active timber management, large hazardous fuels reduction treatments, prescribed fire, assisting property owners with fuels assessments, and other programs to

reduce the risk of catastrophic fire. Our approach is holistic, striving to simultaneously sustain economic, ecological, and cultural values, the so-called "triple bottom line. We recognize that we need to increase the pace and scale of our treatments. We also recognize the cost of failing to act at a scope and scale necessary to meet the challenges of changing climate, more interactions with the wildland urban interface, and limited resources over extended fire seasons can lead to the loss of critical areas and resources that may not be restored for generations.

Many tribes retain off-reservation treaty rights on ceded lands that became National Forests. Catastrophic wildfire on these forests directly and negatively impacts tribes. Since those retained rights are tied to specific areas by treaty, executive order, or agreements with the federal government, tribes are disproportionately impacted when those areas are devastated by wildfire. Even with effective treatments on our own lands, severe wildfires from adjacent federal lands inflict significant damage and economic cost to tribal forests and resources.

Congress noted this when it passed the Tribal Forest Protection Act in 2004. The TFPA was intended to provide tribes a means to propose projects on adjacent federal lands that would protect their rights, lands, and resources by reducing threats from wildfire, insects, and disease.

The ITC is working with the Forest Service and tribes to better implement the TFPA and get more acres treated. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided significant funding for TFPA projects and we anticipate tribes accomplishing more work on federal lands. We also appreciate the 2018 Farm Bill authority to use the "638" contracting authority to propose TFPA projects, as well as adding tribes to the Good Neighbor Authority. However, the next Farm Bill needs to revise that GNA authority to ensure tribes are fully able to participate in the program alongside states and counties.

Tribal land and historical knowledge will play an important role in changing the way forests on all jurisdictions are managed. The Tribal Forest Protection Act, specifically acknowledges the value of "indigenous knowledge and skills of members of the Indian tribe," borrowing from both traditional practices and forestry and fire science.[1]

Finally, the loss of forest products infrastructure – both private and tribal -- threatens the ability to economically treat forests before fire. The ITC would like to work with the committee on a holistic approach to forest management that contemplates protection of that infrastructure.

I invite you to visit reservations to see how Tribes are actively managing our forests to maintain healthy, resilient landscapes. Our management approaches could provide informative examples and contrasts to the results of over a century of misguided fire suppression policies on neighboring federal lands.

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[1] H.R. 3846 - Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004, 25 U.S. Code § 3115a (2004), https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/3846