HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
RANKING MEMBER BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee; Aniela Butler (Aniela @mail.house.gov) and Brandon Miller (Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov)
Date: July 18, 2022
Subject: Republican Forum "*Confronting America's Out-of-Control Wildfire and Forest Health Crisis*."

Committee on Natural Resources Ranking Member Westerman will host a Republican forum examining the real-life impacts of catastrophic wildfires to communities across the country as a result of decades of inadequate forest mismanagement. The forum will be held on **Thursday, July 21, 2022, at 10:30 a.m.** in Room 217 of the Capitol Visitors Center and online via Zoom.

Member offices are requested to notify Baylee Seeman (Baylee.Seeman@mail.house.gov) **no later than Tuesday, July 19, 2022, at 4:00 p.m. EDT** if their Member intends to participate in person in the forum room or remotely from his/her laptop from another location. To continue hearing from local stakeholders and rural Americans who lack the resources to travel to Washington, D.C., witnesses will appear virtually via Zoom.

Please contact Bailey Mailloux (Bailey.Mailloux@mail.house.gov) should any technical difficulties arise.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- 2022 is on pace to be the most destructive wildfire year of all time. More than 5 million acres have already been lost, and wildfire risk projections predict above average fire activity across vast swaths of the country for the remainder of the year.
- Wildfires aren't just statistics; they destroy lives and property, degrade air and water quality, turn abundant and diverse wildlife habitat into moonscapes, and create billions of dollars in economic damages.
- Decades of poor forest management decisions driven by an unrelenting assault from activist environmentalist organizations have led us to this wildfire and forest health crisis.
- Contrary to the propaganda spread by environmental extremist groups, there are scientifically sound solutions to reverse the course and create healthy, more resilient landscapes.
- Responsible active forest management has proven effective where it has been applied, and the need to increase the pace and scale of its application has never been more evident.

- Natural Resources Committee Republicans remain committed to returning responsible active forest management to our nation's overgrown and unhealthy federal lands to truly confront this national crisis.

II. WITNESSES

- **The Honorable James Paxon**, County Commissioner, Sierra County, New Mexico
- **Mr. Scott Lindgren**, Fire Chief, Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District
- **Ms. Hannah Downey**, Policy Director, The Property and Environment Research Center
- **Mr. Rick Goddard**, Chief Executive Officer, Caylym Technologies
- ***Additional Witnesses TBA***

III. BACKGROUND

The 2022 Wildfire Year

Decades of poor management, along with historic drought conditions and rising temperatures, have turned vast swaths of the nation's forests into ticking time bombs. It is no longer a matter of "if" these areas will experience catastrophic wildfire, but "when." Across the U.S., there are now 1 billion acres at risk of wildland fire.[1] More than 117 million acres of federal land – 63 million for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and 54 million for the Department of the Interior (DOI) – are at high or very high risk of wildfire, representing nearly one-fifth of the combined federal lands administered by these agencies.[2] Over the last 20 years in the United States, an average of 7 million acres per year has been burned by wildfire – more than double the average seen during the 1990s.[3] The three worst wildfire seasons on record (2015, 2017, and 2020) all occurred in the last decade, with each burning more than 10 million acres.[4] Alarmingly, the 2022 wildfire season is currently on pace to become the worst season on record, with more than 5 million acres torched already.[5] This rate is double the 10-year average, and nearly triple the amount burned at this time last year.[6]

Unprecedented Drought Conditions

Combined with decades of forest mismanagement, the unprecedented drought facing the West has further weakened overgrown national forests, leaving them extremely vulnerable to wildfire. The West is currently suffering through the most extreme drought on record, with over 76 percent of lands under severe drought conditions or worse.[7] Recent research has shown that some

[1] Chris French, Testimony before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, 6/24/21, https://www.energy.senate.gov/services/files/AAF7DF40-2A47-4951-ADA4-4B124AD3894F#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20there,high%20risk%20of%20wildland%20fire.
[2] Congressional Research Service, "Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020)", Katie Hoover, October 28, 2020, https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R46583?source=search&guid=8a080671120b4e7f92061e82e8a2bdf3&index=6.
[3] Congressional Research Service, "Wildfire Statistics", Katie Hoover, June 1, 2022, https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search&guid=b82a4d954677449b918a65ece823396f&index=0.
[4] *Id.*
[5] National Interagency Fire Center, "National Fire News" https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/nfn.
[6] *Id.*
[7] Wall Street Journal, "Most of U.S. West Is in Severe Drought as Peak Wildfire Season Looms," Camille Bressange, Jim Carlton, and Taylor Umlauf, May 27, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/most-of-u-s-west-is-in-severe-drought-as-peak-wildfire-season-looms-11653659433.

areas are experiencing the driest conditions in 1,200 years.[8] This has caused immense harm to the nation's public lands. In California alone, an estimated 129 million trees died since 2010 as a result of extreme drought, insect infestation and unhealthy tree densities.[9] These dry fuels are serving as tinderboxes on our nation's forests, that can ignite with the smallest spark.

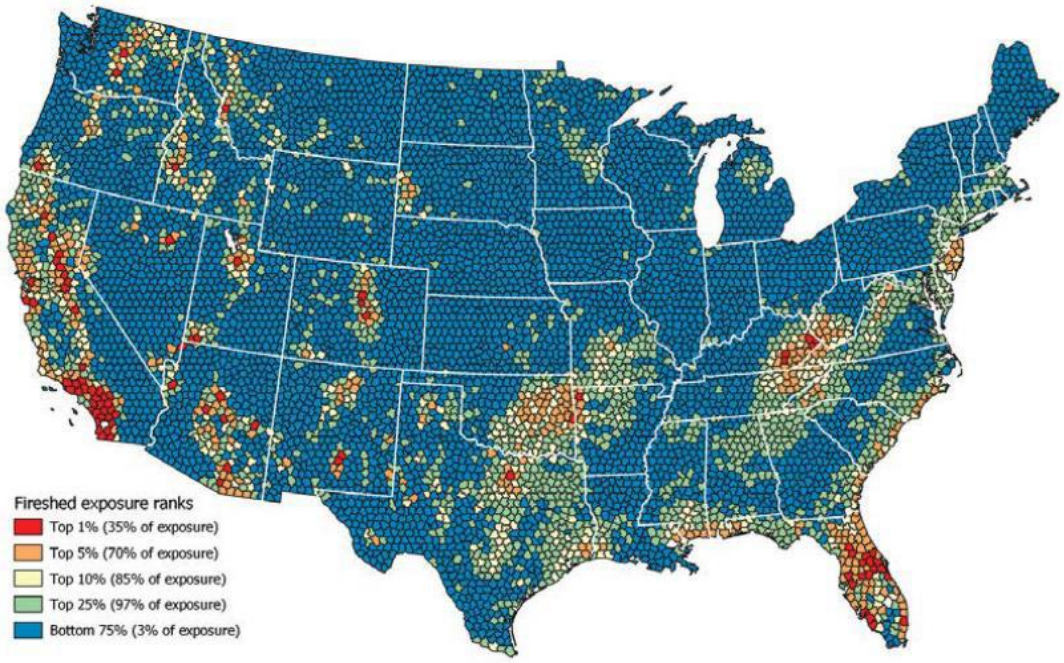
Trees killed in California due to drought conditions insect infestation and unhealthy tree densities.
Source: Western Ecological Research Center.

Recent Actions from the Biden Administration

On January 18, 2022, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack and USFS Chief Randy Moore announced a new 10-year strategy to significantly increase fuels and forest health treatments, including 20 million acres of treatments on public lands and 30 million acres on other federal, state, tribal, and private lands.[10] The strategy will focus on areas identified as being at the highest risk of wildfire, based on community exposure fireshed maps, including the Pacific Northwest, the Sierra Nevada Range in California, the Front Range in Colorado, and in the Southwest.[11] On April 4, 2022, DOI released their own 5-year plan that focuses on fire prone Interior and Tribal lands, including rangelands and other ecosystems with high risk for fires.[12] DOI's plan calls for 2 million acres of hazardous fuel treatments in fiscal year (FY) 2022 to address the wildfire risk on these lands. This would represent a 30 percent

[8] *Id.*
[9] U.S. Forest Service, https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/topics/tree_mortality/california/index.shtml. U.S. Forest Service, "Tree Mortality in California", https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/topics/tree_mortality/california/index.shtml.
[10] USDA, "Secretary Vilsack Announces New 10 Year Strategy to Confront the Wildfire Crisis," January 18, 2022, https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/01/18/secretary-vilsack-announces-new-10-year-strategy-confront-wildfire.
[11] *Id.*.
[12] *Id.*.

increase in treated acres over FY 2021.[13] A total of 3.4 million acres of DOI-administered lands with high to moderate wildfire hazard potential are within the high-risk firesheds identified in USDA's 10-Year Strategy.[14]



Map of the United States' 7,688 firesheds. (May 2021)
Source: Dr. Alan Ager, USFS Research Forester.

Hermits Peak Fire and the Nationwide Prescribed Fire Pause

On May 20, 2022, less than six months after announcing the new strategy to accelerate forest treatments and reduce wildfire risk, USFS announced a pause on prescribed fire operations to conduct a 90-day review of protocols, decision support tools and practices.[15] This pause came after the news that the colossal 341,735-acre Hermits Peak Fire in New Mexico, which merged with the nearby Calf Canyon Fire, became the largest and most destructive fire in state history.[16] This fire began in the 223,333-acre Congressionally-designated Pecos Wilderness due to a poorly executed prescribed fire that escaped the project boundary.[17] This fire has already destroyed 903 structures and racked up over $278 million in suppression costs.[18] Concerningly, USFS approved the prescribed burn that sparked this fire despite ongoing severe drought

[13] U.S. Department of the Interior, "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Wildfire Risk Five-Year Monitoring, Maintenance, and Treatment Plan," April 2022, https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/bil-5-year-wildfire-risk-mmt-plan.04.2022.owf_.final_.pdf.
[14] *Id.*
[15] U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, "Statement of Forest Service Chief Randy Moore Announcing Pause of Prescribed Fire Operations on National Forest System Lands," May 20, 2022, https://www.fs.usda.gov/news/releases/statement-forest-service-chief-randy-moore-announcing-pause-prescribed-fire.
[16] InciWeb – Incident Information System, "Hermits Peak Fire," https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/8049/. Information up-to-date as of July 15, 2022.
[17] InciWeb – Incident Information System, "Hermits Peak Fire," https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/8049/. Accessed on July 13, 2022.
The Washington Post, "New Mexico blaze is now largest wildfire in state history," Bryan Pietsch and Jason Samenow, May 17, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/17/calf-canyon-hermits-peak-fire-new-mexico/.
[18] National Interagency Coordination Center, "National Interagency Coordination Center Incident Management Situation Report" July 12, 2022, https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/sitreprt.pdf. Information up-to-date as of July 15, 2022.

conditions, several red flag warnings issued in the days leading up to the fire, and forecasts of 25 mile-per-hour winds and nine percent humidity on the day of the fire.[19] As part of the 90-day review, USFS released a report in April 2022 reviewing the Gallinas-Las Dispensas prescribed fire that ignited the Hermits Peak Fire.[20] Among the many issues highlighted in the report was the fact that USFS plans failed to recognize challenges posed by tree density and fuel loading and continuity outside the prescribed fire area.[21] The remainder of the review is ongoing, and no details have been released about when nationwide prescribed fire operations will resume. On June 27, 2022, a group of 25 lawmakers wrote to USFS Chief Moore requesting documents related to the pause and encouraging the agency to continue actively treating lands, including through mechanical thinning.[22] The agency has yet to respond.

Justin Grunewald, a USFS Hotshot Captain, pictured during the Willow Fire in June 2021. **Source:** USFS.

Wildland Firefighters

As wildfire seasons have turned into longer and more severe wildfire years, wildland firefighters have been forced into increasingly dangerous and unwinnable situations. These unprecedented conditions have exacerbated significant retention and recruitment challenges in addition to concerns about fair pay, adequate health and retirement benefits, and proper job titles.[23] Earlier this spring, USFS officials in California warned that there were 50 percent fewer applications for

[19] Office of the Governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, "Governor Lujan Grisham statement on cause of Calf Canyon Fire," May 27, 2022, https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2022/05/27/governor-lujan-grisham-statement-on-cause-of-calf-canyon-fire/. Source NM, "Forecasts showed 25 mph gusts on the day U.S. Forest Service ignited prescribed burn," Patrick Lohmann, May 10, 2022, https://sourcenm.com/2022/05/10/forecasts-showed-25-mph-gusts-on-the-day-u-s-forest-service-ignited-prescribed-burn/.

[20] USDA Forest Service Office of the Chief, "Gallinas-Las Dispensas Prescribed Fire Declared Wildfire Review Santa Fe National Forest, Southwestern Region," April 2022, https://www.wildfirelessons.net/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=b6bc7e71-ecca-a7b3-16fb-22b5d69855ae&forceDialog=0.

[21] *Id.*

[22] Letter from 25 lawmakers to Chief Randy Moore, June 27, 2022, https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-06-27_westerman-newhouse_to_moore_re_prescribed_fires.pdf.

[23] Buzzfeed News, "A Forest Service Leader Claimed to Congress That a Hiring Push for Firefighters Had Gone "Very Well." It Hadn't Started Yet," Brianna Sacks, Apr. 27, 2022, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/briannasacks/firefighters-staffing-forest-service-wildland.

GS-3 through GS-9 firefighter positions this year compared to last year.[24] Recently, a hotshot crew member working on New Mexico's Cooks Peak Fire stated: "We are already showing difficulties with staffing at the start of the season. All these fires broke, [and] we didn't have crew orders filled … It's a trainwreck we are heading into."[25] In addition to recruitment, USFS is also failing to retain existing firefighters. Recent reporting indicates that 240 former seasonal workers did not return in Montana and Idaho for this year's fire season.[26]

The Biden administration, in compliance with the requirements of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58), announced a temporary pay increase of $20,000 a year, or 50 percent of base salary, whichever is less, for federal wildland firefighters.[27] In addition to the temporary pay raise, which will expire in two years, the Biden administration is also working to implement a new GS-0456, "Wildland Firefighter" jobs series.[28] This will replace the "Forestry Technician" and "Range Technician" series currently used. Wildland firefighters will have the option to opt-in to the new series or remain in their current job series. While well-intentioned, these temporary measures have been significantly delayed and created uncertainty and confusion among firefighters. The administration has already indicated Congress will need to intervene again to fix significant issues the IIJA created in order to create a long-term, comprehensive solution that fully responds to the needs of our wildland firefighters.[29]

Efforts to address firefighter retention, pay and benefits, while important, must not come at the expense of also addressing the land management decisions that have made wildfire years increasingly dangerous for our wildland firefighters. In the last decade alone, 154 wildland firefighters have tragically lost their lives in the line of duty.[30] Chris Mariano, a wildland firefighter who rose to the rank of squad boss of the elite Truckee hotshot crew, articulated the low morale felt by many of his fellow wildland firefighters in a sobering resignation letter he submitted in April of this year. In that letter, he wrote: "We are losing people at a terrifying rate at a time when wildfires burn longer, hotter, more frequent and with devastating severity."[31] In a follow-up interview, Mr. Mariano further said that: "It almost feels as though we're out there doing the very best we can, but it's not enough…..And that's tough, to know that you're giving everything you have, and communities are still being lost."[32] Until the underlying conditions that are fueling the national wildfire crisis are addressed through significant increases in active forest management, no amount of pay or benefits will truly address the crises our heroic wildland firefighters are experiencing.

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[24] Ximena Bustillo, "'Pretty brutal': Hiring woes plague Biden effort to contain wildfires," Mar. 15, 2022, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/15/bidens-effort-to-contain-wildfires-threatened-by-staffing-woes-00016419.

[25] Buzzfeed News, "A Forest Service Leader Claimed To Congress That a Hiring Push For Firefighters Had Gone "Very Well." It Hadn't Started Yet," Brianna Sacks, Apr. 27, 2022, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/briannasacks/firefighters-staffing-forest-service-wildland

[26] *Id.*

[27] Wildfire Today, "Federal wildland firefighters to receive pay increase July 3, 2022", Bill Gabbert, June 21, https://wildfiretoday.com/2022/06/21/federal-wildland-firefighters-to-receive-pay-increase-july-3-2022/.

[28] *Id.*

[29] Statement of Administration Policy on FY 2023 NDAA, July 13, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/H.R.-7900-NDAA-SAP.pdf.

[30] National Wildfire Coordinating Group, "Risk Management Committee Safety Grams", https://www.nwcg.gov/tags/rmc.

[31] Chris Mariano, Forestry Technician USDA Forest Service, "Letter of Resignation" April 7, 2022, https://ca-times.brightspotcdn.com/87/82/d7df46224d9fb207dafafe4ba33f/letter-of-resignation-002.pdf.

[32] Los Angeles Times, "Hellish fires, low pay, trauma: California's Forest Service firefighters face a morale crisis", Alex Wigglesworth, June 14, 2022, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-06-14/us-forest-service-firefighters-morale-crisis.

The Real-Life Consequences of Catastrophic Fire

Loss of Life and Property

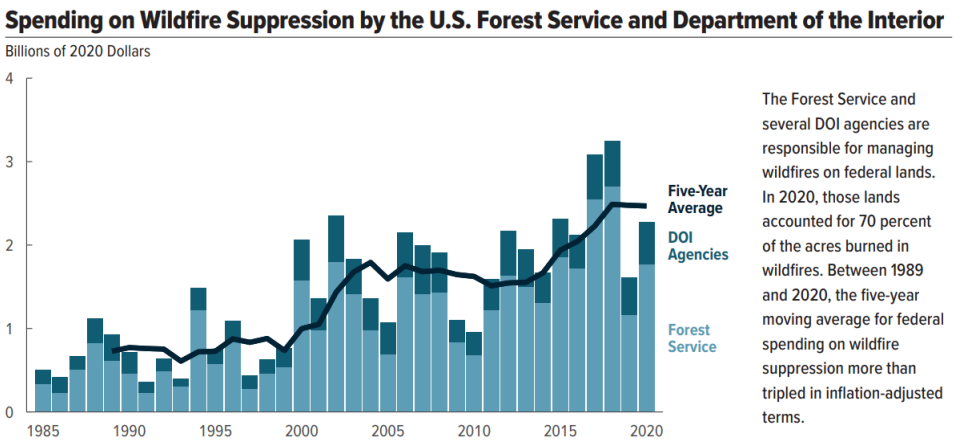
One of the most terrible and heart wrenching consequences of the current catastrophic wildfire crisis is the devastation to life and property. Since 2005, over 89,000 structures have been destroyed by wildfires, leading to an untold number of deaths and enormous personal losses.[33] In the last 4 years alone, over 50,000 structures have been destroyed, including homes, businesses, and entire neighborhoods.[34] Entire communities in the path of uncontrollable megafires have literally been leveled. Just two years ago, the North Complex Fire in California destroyed 2,352 structures, and killed 15 people.[35] The towns of Berry Creek and Feather Falls were entirely engulfed and demolished.[36] The Camp Fire in California also destroyed more than 18,000 structures and 85 people tragically lost their lives.[37] The towns of Paradise and Concow were both essentially destroyed, losing over 95% of all structures.[38] Between 2017 and 2020, there were also 550 civilian wildfire fatalities.[39]

Firefighters in the Indian Falls neighborhood in California, which had dozens of homes burn down in 2020's Dixie Fire.
Source: The Atlantic.

[33] Barrett, Kimiko. "Wildfires Destroy Thousands of Structures Each Year." *Headwaters Economics*, 4 Dec. 2020, headwaterseconomics.org/natural-hazards/structures-destroyed-by-wildfire/.
[34] Congressional Research Service, "Wildfire Statistics", Katie Hoover, June 1, 2022.
[35] CALFIRE, "Top 20 Deadliest California Wildfires", https://www.fire.ca.gov/media/lbfd0m2f/top20_deadliest.pdf.
[36] Deadline, "Tiny California Town Leveled by "Massive Wall of Fire"; 10 Dead, 16 Missing, Trapped Fire Crew Barely Escapes Blazes", Tom Tapp, September 10, 2020, https://deadline.com/2020/09/california-town-berry-creek-destroyed-wildfire-north-complex-bear-fire-10-dead-16-missing-1234575145/.
[37] 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/.
[38] "Paradise Lost: Inside California's Camp Fire." *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, www.cbsnews.com/news/paradise-lost-inside-california-camp-fire-60-minutes/. https://news.sky.com/story/california-wildfires-before-and-after-images-of-the-devastation-in-malibu-and-paradise-11552392.
[39] USA Facts, "Civilian deaths from fires", https://usafacts.org/data/topics/security-safety/fire-and-disaster/fires-and-firefighters/civilian-deaths-from-fires/.

Unfortunately, Forest Service researchers, through fireshed simulation modeling, have identified 1,812 communities in the Western United States could be significantly impacted by future wildfires that would expose an estimated 4,000 structures to wildfire on average annually.[40] Sobering fire models have even predicted plausible extreme fire scenarios in the near future where almost 500,000 buildings could be lost to wildfire in a single fire season.[41] Other scenarios have identified the probability of wildfires igniting on National Forest System lands and burning more than 1.5 million acres in Southern California, destroying 100,000 structures and putting thousands of lives at risk.[42]

Suppression Costs and Economic Damages



Source: Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Fighting these catastrophic fires instead of actively managing our lands to prevent fires has had an enormous cost. Wildland fire suppression costs averaged $2.5 billion between 2016 through 2020 and last year was the most expensive on record, with over $4.3 billion spent fighting wildfires.[43] These costs have risen exponentially over time, as the federal government only spent $728 million on average annually fighting fires between 1985-1989.[44] These fire suppression costs also do not account for the $5 billion in disaster relief assistance provided between 2016-2020.[45]

These federal costs are also only a small portion of the true costs of wildfires, which create tens of billions of dollars' worth of damage for states and local communities. According to CBO, estimates of losses due to wildfire range from $37 billion to $88 billion annually.[46] This includes "the value of structures damaged or destroyed, the lost value of timber, forgone tax revenues, the impact on housing prices, and the costs to evacuate." Importantly, these estimates are likely conservative as they do not account for "business interruptions, damage to infrastructure and public utilities, and disruptions to the supply of goods and services."[47] To highlight this, one

[40] Alan Ager, et al. "Cross-Boundary Wildfire and Community Exposure: A Framework and Application in the Western U.S.," USDA Forest Service, May 2019.
[41] Finney MA, McHugh CW, Grenfell IC, Riley KL, Short KC. A simulation of probabilistic wildfire risk components for the continental United States. Stochastic Environmental Research and Risk Assessment, 2011; 25:973–1000. Short KC, Finney MA, Vogler K, Scott JH, Gilbertson-Day JW, Julie W, Grenfell IC. Spatial datasets of probabilistic wildfire risk components for the United States (270m) 2020. Available at: https://doi.org/10.2737/RDS-2016-0034,
[42] Eliza Barclay, "This is a worst-possible wildfire scenario for Southern California," Vox, https://www.vox.com/2019/9/10/20804560/climate-change-california-wildfire-2019.
[43] National Interagency Fire Center, "Suppression Costs", https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/suppression-costs. CBO, "Wildfires," https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2022-06/57970-Wildfires.pdf.
[44] *Id.*.
[45] *Id.*.
[46] *Id.*.
[47] *Id.*.

study estimated that the economic impact of the 2018 wildfires in California alone was $149 billion.[48] Another study that examined 2003 wildfires in San Diego, California, that burned more than 3,200 homes, estimated the fires had a total economic impact of $2.5 billion.[49] However, once again, these studies also fail to capture the long-term economic effects of lower home prices, higher insurance rates, and businesses and families that choose to leave the area.

Destruction of Wildlife Habitat

Misguided efforts to lock up critical habitat areas have consistently failed to protect threatened species and have instead led to increasingly severe wildfires that destroy vast amounts of wildlife habitat. The plight of the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) is a primary example of this dynamic. For the last 30 years, millions of acres have been set aside in the Pacific Northwest as critical habitat for the NSO, yet their population continues to steadily decline.[50] In 2020, the wildfires that occurred in Oregon pushed them into an "extinction vortex," according to USFS's top scientist on NSOs.[51] The fires burned 360,000 acres of suitable nesting and roosting habitat, of which approximately 194,000 acres are no longer considered viable for the birds.[52] According to USFS scientists, there are "so few animals right now that a big loss from these fires could become destabilizing on the population as a whole."[53] A recent study of megafire impacts on spotted owls in the Sierra Nevada of California also suggested that forest restoration efforts such as such as prescribed fire, managed wildfire and tree thinning that reduce megafires could benefit spotted owls.[54]

Unfortunately, this phenomenon extends further than owls. In California, the 2020 Bobcat Fire turned one of the most abundant wildlife habitats with "lush canyons and [a] mixture of rare and endangered species" into an "apocalypse" that looked like "ground zero after a nuclear explosion."[55] Experts believed this fire would "reverse decades of conservation efforts" for species like the Santa Ana sucker fish and Southern California mountain yellow-legged frog."[56] Catastrophic wildfires also recently forced the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to recommend moving the Greater Sage Grouse from threatened to endangered status in the state.[57] These wildfires also killed nearly half of the state's endangered pygmy rabbit population. A Seattle Times report stated: "The rabbits had asphyxiated as the fire in its fury devoured oxygen from the atmosphere. 'There was nothing but ash and dust,' … 'No movement, no footprints. There was no chance anything survived.'"[58]

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[48] *Id.*.
[49] *Id.*
[50] The Hill, "A new habitat rule can help stop mega wildfires", Nick Smith, 4/16/2021, https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/548659-a-new-habitat-rule-can-help-stop-mega-wildfires/.
[51] USA Today, "Spotted owls pushed closer to 'extinction vortex' by Oregon wildfires," Zach Urness, Salem Statesman Journal, Dec. 1, 2020, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/12/01/northern-spotted-owl-habitat-threatened-oregon-fires/6462923002/.
[52] *Id.*
[53] *Id.*
[54] Animal Conservation, "Megafire causes persistent loss of an old-forest species," G.M. Jones, et al., April 26, 2021, https://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs_journals/2021/rmrs_2021_jones_g002.pdf.
[55] Sahagun, Louis, "Bobcat fire aftermath threatens endangered species in San Gabriel Mountains," LA Times, October 14, 2016, https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2020-10-14/fire-stripped-slopes-and-winter-storms-point-to-a-bleak-scenario-for-wildlife-in-the-san-gabriel-mountains.
[56] *Id.*
[57] Mapes, Lynda, "2020 wildfires left precious endangered species habitat in Central Washington 'nothing but ash and dust'," The Seattle Times, June 7, 2021, https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/2020-wildfires-left-precious-endangered-species-habitat-in-central-washington-nothing-but-ash-and-dust/.
[58] *Id.*

San Francisco famously turned a vibrant shade of orange in 2020 due to wildfire smoke. **Source:** LA Times.

Carbon Emissions and Air Quality

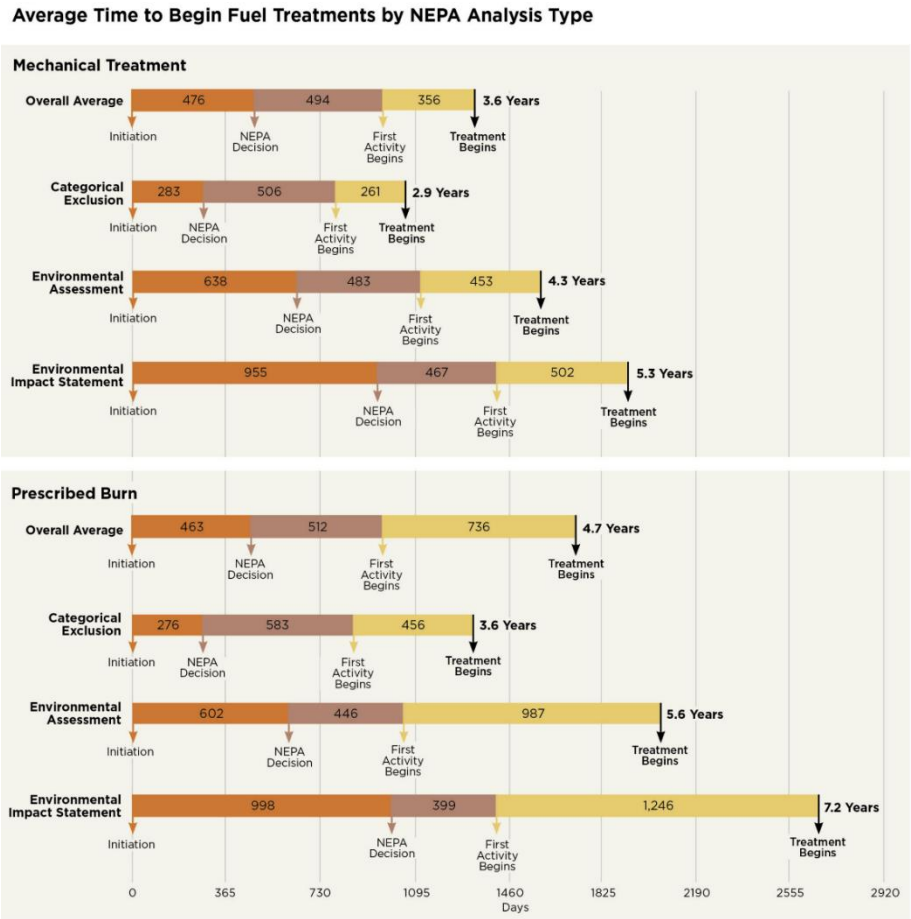
Catastrophic wildfires release millions of metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere. Last year, wildfires in the Western United States emitted 130 million metric tons of carbon, the equivalent of driving 28.3 million passenger cars for an entire year.[59] This included 75 million metric tons from California and 17 million tons from Oregon released in just three months.[60] The year prior, wildfires in California emitted roughly 112 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (equivalent to the emissions of 24.2 million passenger cars).[61] For comparison, in 2019, California's entire electric power and commercial and residential sectors emitted only 102.6 million metric tons of carbon.[62] When U.S. travel came to a near halt after COVID-19 in 2020, the wildfires in California and Oregon alone wiped out all the resulting U.S. gains in emissions reductions.[63]

In addition to emissions, there are also significant air quality impacts that can have far-reaching consequences for people across the nation. During summer months, wildfire smoke can travel as far as 3,000 miles away to cities like Philadelphia and New York, creating dangerous air quality levels.[64] In Western communities, hazy conditions can negatively impact popular outdoor destinations that drive tourism in gateway communities. For example, last summer, "travelers rolling up to storied mountain ranges in their campers [found] peaks shrouded in haze from fires and record-setting temperatures. In places that are not yet suffering from fire emergencies, charred vistas from last year's fires have led to restrictions on where it is safe to hike."[65] From outfitters and guides to outdoor recreationalists, these smoky conditions can seriously interrupt quality of life and enjoyment of the outdoors and public lands, in particular.

[59] New York Times, "California's Wildfires Had an Invisible Impact: High Carbon Dioxide Emissions," September 27, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/21/climate/wildfire-emissions-climate-change.html.
[60] *Id.*
[61] "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.
[62] California Air Resources Board, "Current California GHG Emission Inventory Data," https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/ghg-inventory-data.
[63] 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/.
[64] NPR, "The Western Wildfires Are Affecting People 3,000 Miles Away," July 21, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/07/21/1018865569/the-western-wildfires-are-affecting-people-3-000-miles-away.
[65] Rowland, Christopher, "National park crowds across the West are braving intense heat and hazy skies," The Washington Post, July 18, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/07/18/national-parks-heat-fires/.

Inadequate Forest Management Fueling The Wildfire Crisis

For decades, land management agencies have consistently fallen short of carrying out forest management activities at the pace and scale necessary to truly confront the wildfire crisis in a meaningful way. USFS, for instance, has only been able to carry out 2 million acres of treatments annually in recent decades.[66] At this paltry rate, it will take USFS more than 30 years to complete the necessary treatments. In some instances, like the Sequoia groves in California, it would take USFS 52 years just to treat 19 high-priority groves, which amounts to only a few thousand acres of treatments.[67]



Across all mechanical treatment projects, it takes an average of 3.6 years (1,325 days) to move from project initiation to start of treatment. For all prescribed burn projects, the corresponding time averages 4.7 years (1,711 days). For both types of project, it takes longer to begin the treatment as the level of environmental analysis becomes more rigorous. Similarly, the average time to complete NEPA review, displayed as the orange interval between Initiation and NEPA Decision, noticeably increases as the rigor of analysis increases.

Source: Property and Environment Research Center.

Regulatory Barriers and Endless Frivolous Litigation

Burdensome regulations and frivolous lawsuits filed by extreme environmentalist organizations continuously bog down proper forest management projects. According to a recent report from the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC), it takes an average of 3.6 years to begin mechanical treatments and 4.7 years to begin a prescribed burn.[68] The absurd amount of time it takes to bullet proof even the smallest management projects demonstrate how unlikely it will be for our land management agencies to achieve their goal of treating an additional 50 million acres over the next 10 years.

[66] 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/.
[67] Information provided by USFS through technical assistance.
[68] 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/.

The two primary regulatory culprits delaying necessary actions are the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA, 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.). NEPA was originally intended to ensure an appropriate balance between protecting the environment and managing the nation's natural resources. It has instead become a tool for activist groups to delay and shut down necessary projects. As NEPA has become "the most litigated area of environmental law," federal land managers attempt to anticipate legal arguments and overanalyze potential impacts and alternatives.[69] This causes 'analysis paralysis,' which leads to a much lengthier and costly process. An example of this broken system is the Hungry Ridge Restoration project in the Nez-Perce Clearwater National Forest. The NEPA process for that project, which proposed just 7,144 acres of harvest to reduce fire danger and improve resilience, took more than 7 years, including a 340-page final Environmental Impact Statement and almost 1,350 separate documents.[70] Astoundingly, that project has now been challenged in court.[71]

Like NEPA, the ESA has morphed from a well-intentioned law to protect endangered species into a weapon used to shut down responsible management of our forests, ironically fueling wildfires that destroy the very habitat the ESA seeks to protect. When an agency decision may impact a listed species or its habitat, the ESA requires agencies to complete lengthy consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.[72] This process consistently creates significant delays.[73] A prime example of how the ESA impacts forest management can be seen in the case of the Bozeman Municipal Watershed project that was delayed more than 15 years due to challenges by litigious environmental groups.[74] The project would address the wildfire risk on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest that is threatening 80 percent of the city of Bozeman's water supply.[75] While the NEPA process was slow in its own right, the 2009 reversal of the delisting of the local grizzly bear population triggered ESA's consultation requirements and laid the groundwork for over a decade of lawsuits.[76] This illustrates the weaponization of the ESA that continues to leave communities vulnerable to the threat of wildfire.

Locking Up Lands

Another consistent obstacle blocking responsible forest management activities is the massive amount of land locked up under restrictive land designations. Across the nation, roughly 235 million acres (about one-third of all federal lands) are currently managed under restrictive designations such as wilderness areas and national monuments. These restrictive designations

[69] Executive Office of the President, Council on Environmental Quality, "*CEQ Issues Final Rule to Modernize Its NEPA Regulations* (July 15, 2020), https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/20200716Final-NEPAPress-Release.pdf.
[70] U.S. Forest Service, "*Hungry Ridge Restoration Project*", https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=43661.
[71] Idaho County Free Press, *Lawsuit Challenges Hungry Ridge, 'End of the World' project; Friends of the Clearwater Seek Judgment to Vacate Decisions*, David Rauzi, May 5, 2021, https://www.idahocountyfreepress.com/news/lawsuit-challenges-hungry-ridge-end-of-the-world-project-friends-of-the-clearwater-seek-judgment/article_628956d0-ad39-11eb-a381-839674a40530.html.
[72] 16 U.S.C. § 1536-Interagency cooperation.
[73] PERC, "Fix America's Forests" Holly Fretwell and Jonathan Wood, April 2021, https://www.perc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/fix-americas-forests-restore-national-forests-tackle-wildfire-crisis.pdf.
[74] PERC, "Progress for the Bozeman Municipal Watershed Project", Holly Fretweel and Jack Smith, May 14th, 2021, https://www.perc.org/2021/05/14/progress-for-the-bozeman-municipal-watershed-project/.
[75] PERC, "Progress for the Bozeman Municipal Watershed Project", Holly Fretweel and Jack Smith, May 14th, 2021, https://www.perc.org/2021/05/14/progress-for-the-bozeman-municipal-watershed-project/.
[76] PERC, "Fix America's Forests" Holly Fretwell and Jonathan Wood, April 2021, https://www.perc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/fix-americas-forests-restore-national-forests-tackle-wildfire-crisis.pdf.

significantly limit federal land managers' ability to perform wildfire mitigation activities. In the last decade, more than 9 million acres of national monument and wilderness areas, the designations with the most rigid forest management restrictions, burned in catastrophic wildfires.[77] There are also 58.2 million acres of inventoried roadless areas on USFS lands and research has shown that "an area equivalent to approximately one-third of roadless areas burned in the last three decades, while an area equivalent to less than one-fifth of roaded areas experienced fires" despite the fact that roadless areas are "generally [in] cooler, moister, and higher elevation landscapes less conducive to fire."[78] Even more concerning is that fact that the largest fires that burned on national forest land in recent years began in roadless areas.[79]

Instead of re-thinking this failed strategy of locking up lands, Committee Democrats have advanced legislation during this Congress that would collectively lock up nearly 82.8 million acres of land from active management.[80]

Proactive Solutions to Restore Forest Health

Congressional Republicans are committed to solutions that will restore active management to our federal lands. Legislation like the Resilient Federal Forests Act (H.R. 4614) and Trillion Trees Act (H.R. 2639) represent comprehensive solutions that will restore our overgrown, fire-prone federal lands through active management and responsible stewardship. This reflects the scientific consensus that forest management projects not only reduce the risk of wildfire but improve overall forest health as well.[81] It also follows real-world examples, such as the Wallow Fire in 2011.

> Many fuels treatments have worked, stopping a wildfire and saving homes. In 2011, for Example, the Wallow Fire—the largest in Arizona history—was bearing down on the WUI community of Alpine, roaring through tree crowns in dense ponderosa pine and threatening homes ahead. When the fire reached a treated area, it dropped to the forest floor and started crawling through ground fuels, letting firefighters safely get in and control it. Hundreds of homes were saved. Many treatments in other areas have also moderated fire behavior, buying firefighters time to evacuate people and protect homes, communities, and infrastructure. By moderating fire behavior, treatments can also ensure that a wildfire benefits a forest ecologically rather than damaging soils, habitats, watersheds, and other elements of forest health.[82]

Similarly, a recent Washburn Fire Incident update issued by the National Park Service, California Interagency Incident Management Team 13, and U.S. Forest Service stated:

> For many years there has been a concerted effort to reduce the large amounts of trees (both living and dead) in certain areas within Yosemite National Park. This never-ending

[77] Congressional Research Service, "Wildfire Acres Burned in Wilderness Areas and National Monuments 2009 to 2021" https://republicans-naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/WildfireAcresBurned_WildernessNM_2009_2021_1tb_20220216.pdf.
[78] Environ, "Does conserving roadless wildland increase wildfire activity in western US national forests?" James D. Johnston et al 2021, https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac13ee/pdf.
[79] *Id.*
[80] Data compiled by HNRC staff.
[81] *Id.*
[82] *Id.*

> task involves thinning trees with a variety of masticating and chipping equipment, chainsaws and through the use of low intensity ground fire when conditions permit. The high severity fire activity we are currently experiencing on the Washburn Fire is the result of fire being fueled by a large forested area with an extremely concentrated biomass. So, who or what benefits from the reduction of the biomass? If you have a chance to visit the Mariposa Grove after the fire you will see the results of a low intensity fire burning in an area where the biomass has already been reduced. The result is that the Mariposa Grove survived, remains in good health and a healthier habitat has been created for local flora and fauna.[83]

The results speak for themselves, and in order to fully get a grasp on the out-of-control wildfire crisis, Congress needs to take action to accelerate the pace and scale of scientific forest management activities.

The Sycan Marsh Preserve in Oregon. The 2020 Bootleg Fire burned an area the size of Rhode Island and created its own weather system called "fire-nados," but became manageable once it entered the Sycan Marsh due to extensive hazardous fuels reduction treatments that had previously been conducted.
Source: New York Times

[83] National Park Service, California Interagency Incident Management Team 13, U.S. Forest Service, "Washburn Fire Incident Update," July 13, 2022.