



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

**To:** House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members  
**From:** Subcommittee on Federal Lands, Brandon Miller – [Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov](mailto:Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov)  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 8, 2023  
**Subject:** Oversight Hearing on “*Promoting Conservation with a Purpose on America’s Federal Lands and Forests*”

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The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “Promoting Conservation with a Purpose on America’s Federal Lands and Forests” on Wednesday, March 8, at 10:15 a.m. EST in 1324 Longworth House Office Building.

Member offices are requested to notify Sophia Varnasidis ([sophia@mail.house.gov](mailto:sophia@mail.house.gov)) by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 7, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

## **I. KEY MESSAGES**

- Conservation with a purpose means promoting federal land management policies that build resilient communities, promote access, and harness American innovation.
- Our federal lands are facing unprecedented crises. Catastrophic wildfires, growing deferred maintenance backlogs, and degradation of multiple use are disproportionately affecting the economy, environment, and safety of rural communities.
- Preservationist policies that lock up our nation’s abundant resources will only exacerbate the historically devastating wildfire and drought crisis, rural economic decline, and the loss of access and enjoyment to large parts of our federal lands.
- Republican witnesses will highlight the unique State, Tribal, and local perspectives that are necessary to promoting conservation with a purpose on our federal lands and forests.

## **II. WITNESSES**

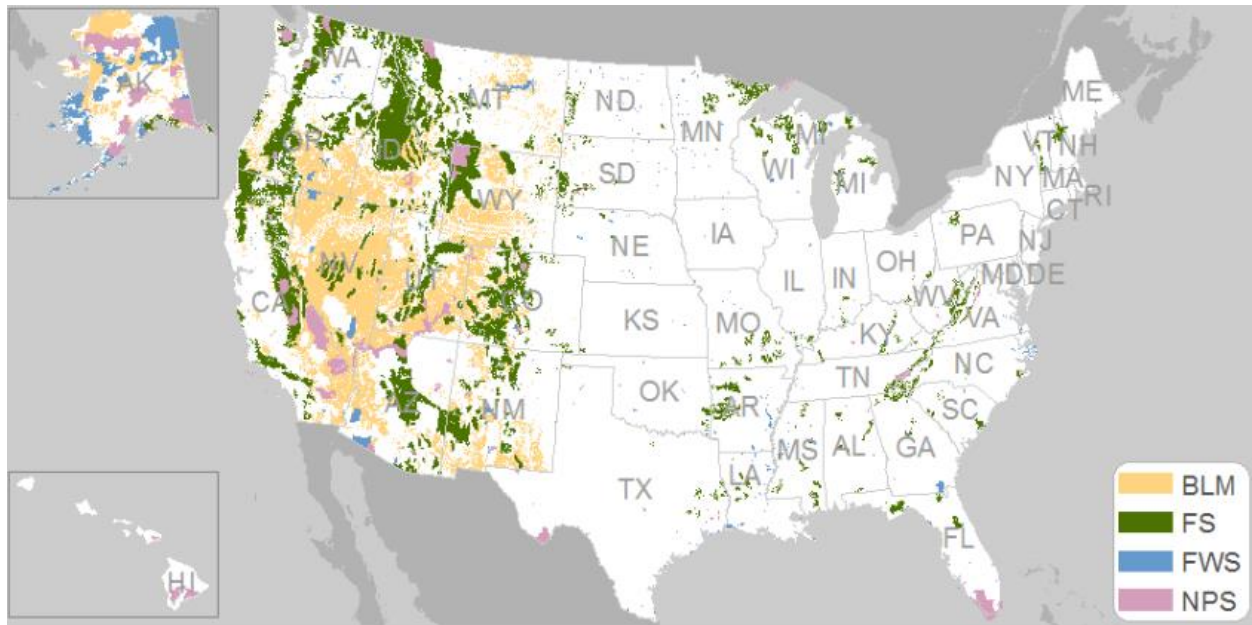
- **The Honorable Joel Ferry**, Executive Director, Utah Department of Natural Resources, Salt Lake City, Utah
- **The Honorable John Espy**, Commissioner, Board of Carbon County Commissioners, Rawlins, Wyoming
- **Mr. Phil Rigdon**, Vice President, Intertribal Timber Council, Toppenish, Washington
- **Mr. John D. Leshy**, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, UC Law San Francisco, San Francisco, CA

### III. BACKGROUND

#### Conservation with a Purpose

##### *Overview*

Federal land management agencies are facing a myriad of challenges including unhealthy, overgrown forests and a historically devastating wildfire crisis; crumbling infrastructure and growing maintenance backlogs; diminished access and opportunities for outdoor recreation; and the loss of critically important economic activity. This is due, in part, to the vast size of the federal estate. The federal government owns approximately 640 million acres of land, or roughly 28 percent of the entire land base of the United States.<sup>1</sup> A majority of these lands are located in the West, where nearly 47 percent of all land is owned by the Federal Government.<sup>2</sup> Of these lands, the National Parks Service (NPS) manages 80 million acres, the Forest Service (FS) manages 193 million acres, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 244 million acres.<sup>3</sup> This acreage is expected to continue growing, with the recent changes to make the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which funds federal land acquisition, among other activities, permanent and mandatory.<sup>4</sup> While NPS lands are managed exclusively for resource protection and public enjoyment purposes, FS and BLM are both required to manage their lands for sustained yields and multiple uses including timber harvesting, grazing, outdoor recreation, energy and mineral production, conservation, and wildlife habitat.<sup>5</sup> When done correctly, these lands are managed in a way that balances multiple uses and the needs of all American people. This is true conservation.



**Source:** Congressional Research Service, 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data,” Carol Hardy Vincent and Laura A. Hanson, February 21, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Great American Outdoors Act; P.L. 116-152.

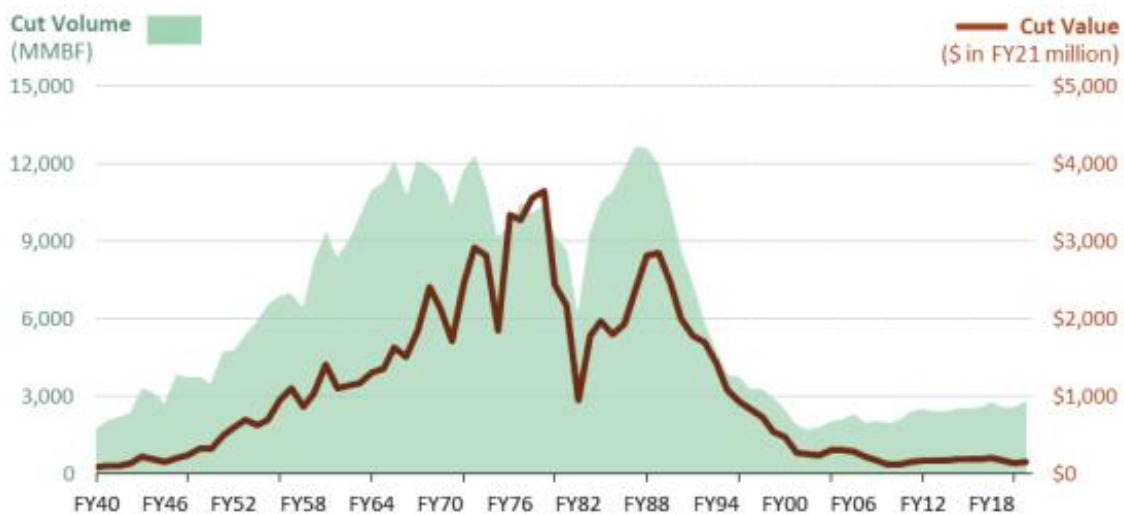
<sup>5</sup> Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act (16 USC 528) and Federal Land Policy and Management Act (43 USC 1701).

Unfortunately, true conservation on federal lands has been increasingly jeopardized by an amalgamation of restrictive land use designations, increasingly burdensome environmental regulations, and frivolous litigation from extreme environmentalists, contributing to general mismanagement by federal land managers. House Republicans are committed to restoring conservation to our federal lands to provide the American people with both a healthy environment and a thriving economy through renewed access and utilization of our natural resources.

Conservation does not mean locking-up lands and throwing away the key. True conservation means safe and responsible land stewardship driven by sound science and active management to benefit future generations. This mission requires local buy-in and collaboration to create lasting and successful public land management policies. Pursuing conservation with a purpose will lead to more resilient communities, greater access to our nation’s resources, and better environmental outcomes for all.

*Building Resilient Communities*

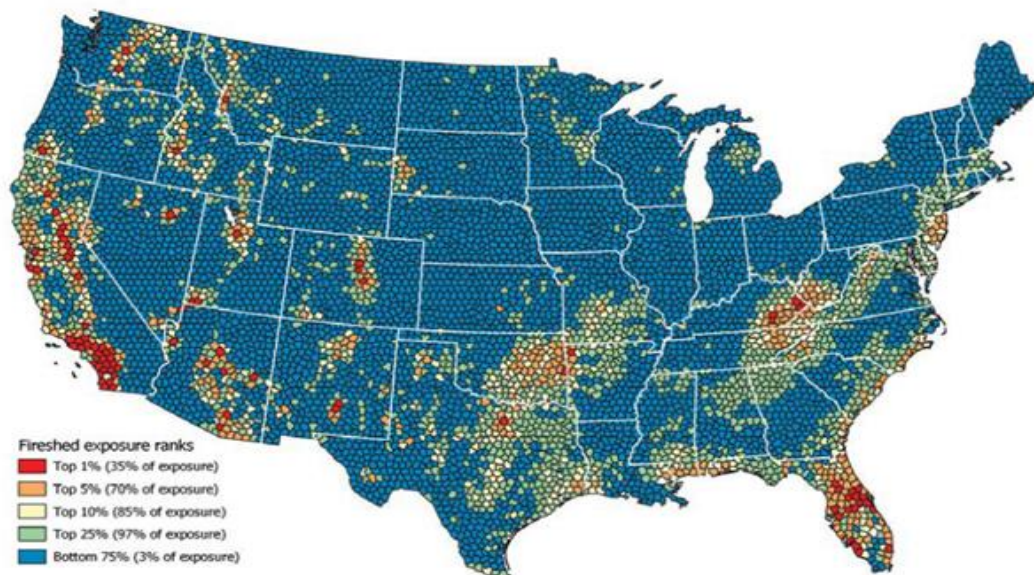
Federal lands mismanagement makes communities across the nation less resilient economically, environmentally, and diminishes national security along our borders. States and communities with large federal footprints rely on those lands for economic opportunities and revenue to support education and other important programs that benefit the public. Grazing and timber harvesting are two important uses of public lands that not only produce important economic opportunities for rural communities, but also benefit the environment by promoting active, responsible stewardship. Unfortunately, decades of poor management decisions curtailed these economic opportunities, diminishing much needed revenue to local communities to fund vital services. In addition, federal lands are nontaxable. This combination made programs like Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) necessary to counteract budget shortfalls. SRS was specifically created in response to declining timber sales in the 1990s, as a result of federal actions such as the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl as an endangered



Annual cut volume and value, FY 1940-FY 2021. **Source:** Congressional Research Service, 2022.

species.<sup>6</sup> While programs like PILT and SRS provide critically important support to public land communities, the fact remains that many of these communities still struggle to meet their economic and local governing needs. This has been especially true in recent years, as supply chain disruptions and inflation have disproportionately impacted rural communities compared to urban communities.<sup>7</sup> Responsible land management and resource development would help many of these rural communities be more economically resilient, particularly during recessionary periods.

Compounding the economic harm caused by negligent management of federal lands and forests are the devastating wildfires that continue to wreak havoc across the West year after year. Vast swaths of our public lands are unhealthy, overgrown, and in desperate need of proper care and management. These overgrown forests have become literal tinderboxes, as drought conditions in the West are the driest conditions in the past 1,200 years.<sup>8</sup> This has caused immense harm to the nation’s public lands. In California alone, an estimated 129 million trees have died since 2010 and 36.3 million trees died in the last year alone as a result of extreme drought, insect infestation, and unhealthy tree densities.<sup>9</sup> In the last 20 years, wildfires destroyed an average of 7 million acres per year, which is more than double the average seen during the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> The three worst wildfire seasons on record all occurred in the last decade, each burning over 10 million acres.<sup>11</sup> From 2017 to 2021, nearly 65 percent of lands burned by wildfire were federal lands, illustrating the consequences of poor land management.<sup>12</sup>



National map of the 7,688 firesheds. **Source:** Alan Ager, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Congressional Research Service, Report R41303, “The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act: Background and Issues,” Katie Hoover, Apr. 21, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R41303>.

<sup>7</sup> Rajashri Chakrabarti et al., “Rural Households Hit Hardest by Inflation in 2021-22,” Liberty Street Economics, January 18, 2023, <https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2023/01/rural-households-hit-hardest-by-inflation-in-2021-22/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/topics/tree\\_mortality/california/index.shtml](https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/topics/tree_mortality/california/index.shtml). <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/ltbmu/news-events/?cid=FSEPRD1088652>.

<sup>10</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Wildfire Statistics”, Katie Hoover, December 2, 2022, [https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search#\\_Ref21088511](https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search#_Ref21088511)

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

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

A lack of proper forest management, combined with worsening drought conditions and rising temperatures, has made communities across the West less resilient to wildfires and left entire communities to literally go up in smoke. Since 2005, over 89,000 structures were destroyed by wildfires, leading to an untold number of deaths and enormous personal losses.<sup>13</sup> In 2021, the Caldor Fire in California destroyed over 1,000 buildings, including nearly two-thirds of the town of Grizzly Flats.<sup>14</sup> In 2018, the Camp Fire in California destroyed over 18,000 structures and 85 people tragically lost their lives.<sup>15</sup> The towns of Paradise and Concow were both essentially destroyed, losing over 95 percent of all structures.<sup>16</sup> According to the latest FS fireshed mapping, 71 percent of BLM lands and 89 percent of FS lands “have the potential for wildfires to ignite and spread to communities.”<sup>17</sup> Forest Service researchers have identified 1,812 communities in the Western United States that could be significantly impacted by future wildfires, exposing an estimated 4,000 structures to wildfire on average annually.<sup>18</sup> Sobering fire models 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.<sup>19</sup> Other scenarios identified the probability of wildfires igniting on FS lands and burning over 1.5 million acres in Southern California, destroying 100,000 structures and putting thousands of lives at risk.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Barrett, Kimiko. “Wildfires Destroy Thousands of Structures Each Year.” *Headwaters Economics*, 4 Dec. 2020, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/natural-hazards/structures-destroyed-by-wildfire>.

<sup>14</sup> Jim Carlton et al., “They Moved to Rural California for Affordable Homes. Then the Caldor Fire Destroyed the Town.” November 6, 2021, WSJ, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/they-moved-to-rural-california-for-affordable-homes-then-the-caldor-fire-destroyed-the-town-11636207202>.  
Rodd, Scott, “Stalled U.S. Forest Service project could have protected California town from Caldor Fire destruction,” CapRadio, August 16, 2022, <https://www.capradio.org/articles/2022/08/16/stalled-us-forest-service-project-could-have-protected-california-town-from-caldor-fire-destruction>.

<sup>15</sup> Press, Associated. “List of Missing in Camp Fire Down to 1.” *FOX40*, FOX40, 2 Aug. 2019, <http://fox40.com/news/california-connection/one-still-missing-in-camp-fire>.

<sup>16</sup> “Paradise Lost: Inside California’s Camp Fire.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, [www.cbsnews.com/news/paradise-lost-inside-california-camp-fire-60-minutes/](http://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>.

<sup>17</sup> A fireshed is a landscape-scale area that faces similar wildfire threats where a fire management strategy could affect fire outcomes. Alan Ager, et al. “Development and Application of the Fireshed Registry,” USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region, May 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Ager, et al. “Cross-Boundary Wildfire and Community Exposure: A Framework and Application in the Western U.S.,” USDA Forest Service, May 2019.

<sup>19</sup> 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>.

<sup>20</sup> 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>.



Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) surveys trash and environmental degradation along the Southern border. **Source:** HNRC Republicans, 2021.

Another major issue impacting the resiliency and safety of communities across the nation is the ongoing crisis at our nation's Southern border. Some of the most dangerous areas along the Southern border are the estimated 632 miles of federal land, representing approximately 32 percent of the border.<sup>21</sup> Federal lands along the border are specifically targeted by criminals, drug smugglers, and human traffickers because they are remote, uninhabited, and less frequently patrolled. During a May 27, 2021, Natural Resources Committee Republican forum about the impacts of President Biden's border crisis, several witnesses highlighted the negative consequences of then-record setting numbers of cross-border violators (CBVs), including destruction of private ranchlands, degradation of sensitive environmental areas, and safety concerns, for both Customs and Border Patrol agents and private citizens.<sup>22</sup> The high levels of CBVs also deprive the public of access to federally owned lands. There are also devastating environmental consequences of illegal immigration. Illegal immigrants leave behind trash including human waste, medical products, abandoned

vehicles, and plastic. This illegal dumping of trash along the border threatens wildlife, destroys habitat, and attracts disease carrying insects such as mosquitoes and flies. Human waste is a growing problem that contaminates the drinking water for nearby residents. In fiscal year (FY) 2021, BLM district offices cleaned up 235 sites, collecting over 193 tons of garbage.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, illegal trails and wildfires sparked by CBV's campfires contribute to the destruction of wildlife habitat throughout federal borderlands.

In the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, House Republicans will advance reforms to improve federal lands management, balances conservation goals and makes communities more resilient economically, environmentally, and in their security. To confront the wildfire crisis, House Republicans have crafted numerous pieces of legislation to expedite environmental analysis, reduce frivolous lawsuits, improve State, Tribal and local collaboration, and promote landscape scale management to treat extremely high-risk areas and communities. This includes legislation introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> and 118<sup>th</sup> Congress such as the Forest Information Reform (FIR) Act, Trillion Trees Act, Resilient Federal Forests Act, No Timber From Tyrants Act, Save Our Sequoias (SOS) Act, and the FIRESHEDS Act.<sup>24</sup> Committee Republicans will continue to

<sup>21</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Federal and Indian Lands on the U.S.-Mexico Border," Carol Hardy Vincent, February 21, 2018, IF10832.

<sup>22</sup> *The Biden Border Crisis: Environmental and Humanitarian Consequences: Forum Before H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Republicans*, 117th Cong. (2021).

<sup>23</sup> Data provided by Bureau of Land Management to Committee Staff, February 6, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Forest Information Reform (FIR) Act, H.R. 200, 118th, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/200?s=1&r=15>. Trillion Trees Act, H.R. 2639, 117th, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2639/text>. Resilient Federal Forests Act (RFFA), H.R. 4614, 117th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4614?s=1&r=80>. No Timber From Tyrants Act, H.R. 7437, 117th,

investigate challenges faced by Border Patrol agents on federal borderlands and the environmental impact of illegal border crossings and drug smuggling, as well as advance legislation to promote economic development in areas with large federal footprints by increasing access to our natural resources.

### *Promoting Access and Creating New Outdoor Recreation Opportunities*

More Americans than ever are choosing to recreate outdoors at national parks and public lands, fueling the outdoor recreation economy. In 2022, visitation to our national parks grew by 5 percent to 312 million total recreation visits.<sup>25</sup> In 2021, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 1.9 percent (\$454 billion) of current-dollar U.S.



Overcrowding at Grand Canyon National Park. **Source:** The New York Times, 2021. GDP.<sup>26</sup> Many gateway communities to our nation’s parks depend on this visitation and well managed national parks to sustain their economic growth. However, with increased visitation comes numerous challenges related to overcrowding, diminished visitor experiences, crumbling infrastructure, and growing maintenance backlogs.

Our national parks and public lands are popular because they offer an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities. Hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, kayaking, camping, hiking, mountain biking, skiing, and rock climbing are just a few of the unique outdoor experiences that attract generations of visitors to our public lands. Unfortunately, outdoor recreation opportunities are not always easily accessible. Recreating on federal lands often requires special permits and the payment of fees that, while important to help maintain our federal lands, can involve confusing, cumbersome, and costly processes for both recreationists and recreation service providers. Another consistent threat to outdoor recreation opportunities is the ongoing effort by extreme environmentalists to lock-up more federal lands under restrictive land designations, such as wilderness areas or national monuments. In the case of wilderness areas, this can severely

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/7437/text?r=6&s=4>. Save Our Sequoias Act, H.R. 8168, 117th, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8168/text?r=1&s=1>. Forest Improvements through Research and Emergency Stewardship for Healthy Ecosystem Development and Sustainability (FIRESHEDS) Act, H.R. 4664, 117th, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4664/text?r=51&s=1>.

<sup>25</sup> National Park Service, “Annual Visitation Highlights,” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/annual-visitation-highlights.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2021, November 9, 2022, <https://www.bea.gov/news/2022/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-states-2021>.

restrict popular forms of recreation that require the use of bicycles, strollers, adaptive equipment, handcarts used by sportsmen, or other forms of mechanized vehicles.<sup>27</sup>

Another persistent challenge inhibiting outdoor recreation is our federal land management agencies' growing deferred maintenance backlogs. Crumbling infrastructure not only impacts visitor experiences and enjoyment of public lands, it can also lead to serious safety issues and aggravate other persistent issues, such as overcrowding. In total, the federal land management agencies have nearly \$35.3 billion in deferred maintenance needs, including \$22.8 billion for NPS, \$4.4 billion for BLM, \$1.8 billion for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$6.3 billion for FS.<sup>28</sup> In 2020, Congress passed and President Trump signed into law the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) to provide \$9.5 billion in dedicated funding to address deferred maintenance.<sup>29</sup> Alarming, the maintenance backlogs of all four land management agencies have increased since the passage of that legislation, led by a nearly \$10 billion increase in the size of NPS's backlog.<sup>30</sup> In a March 2022 report, the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that DOI lacked a strategy to maximize the impact of the GAOA and failed to implement best management practices for deferred maintenance projects.<sup>31</sup> Despite the clear mismanagement of these funds, Committee Democrats did not hold a single oversight hearing on GAOA funding during the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. House Republicans intend to conduct vigorous oversight of these funds to ensure that national parks and public lands can finally start seeing decreases in deferred maintenance needs.

In addition to conducting this oversight and holding agencies accountable for spending, House Republicans are committed to advancing legislation to improve access and opportunities for outdoor recreation on federal lands. Instead of locking up lands under burdensome land designations, House Republicans will expand access to federal lands to ensure that all Americans have ample opportunities to hunt, fish, bike, hike, camp, boat, and participate in outdoor recreation. This will involve cutting red tape that makes it difficult to get the proper permits to enjoy our federal lands and streamlining approvals for new recreational uses. Republicans will also work to ensure that agencies do not move forward with regulations that would unnecessarily limit certain types of popular activities, such as recreational rock climbing.

### *Harnessing American Innovation*

Improving federal land management will require embracing innovative solutions and better collaboration with local stakeholders. Years of simply 'throwing money at the problem' has not only failed to adequately address the challenges facing our federal land management agencies, it also stifled innovative and practical solutions. Federal land management agencies notoriously struggled with updating their technology and adapting to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In fact, one major hurdle to achieving better land management is that the federal government does not know exactly how much land it actually owns. Since 2003, the Government Accountability Office (GAO)

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<sup>27</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Wilderness: Overview, Management, and Statistics," July 29, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Carol Hardy Vincent et al., "The Great American Outdoors Act (P.L. 116-152)," CRS, December 15, 2022.

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

<sup>30</sup> Congressional Research Service, "The Great American Outdoors Act" (P.L. 116-152)" December 15, 2022, Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura B. Comay, Bill Heniff Jr., <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF11636?source=search>

<sup>31</sup> U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL, 2021-CR0013, THE U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR NEEDS A STRATEGY TO COORDINATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT (Mar. 23, 2022) at 3-4.



listed federal real property management on its High Risk List due to the likelihood of “fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement” and the need for reforms.<sup>32</sup> House Republicans successfully worked to advance solutions to address this glaring issue with the passage of the Modernizing Access to Our Public Land (MAPLand) Act and the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act (FLAIR) Act last Congress.<sup>33</sup> These laws direct the agencies to digitize and standardize mapping records and create a single searchable online database of federal land ownership. These laws will help enhance access public lands and create transparency and clarity for the American people.



Bathhouse Row in Hot Springs National Park.  
**Source:** Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 2021.

Private partners play a critical role in helping spur innovation at our federal land management agencies and reducing reliance on federal funding. Utilizing increased public-private partnerships can provide innovative solutions to address problems like deferred maintenance and overcrowding. For example, historic Bathhouse Row in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, is a unique public-private partnership

that used historic leasing to turn dilapidated bathhouses into economic drivers of downtown Hot Springs.<sup>34</sup> House Republicans also crafted other innovative solutions, including the Partnership Agreements Creating Tangible Savings (PACTS) Act and the Lodging Options Developed for Government Employees (LODGE) Act to help address these considerable challenges.<sup>35</sup> The PACTS Act seeks to alleviate administrative hurdles by expanding the use of cooperative management agreements to tackle necessary maintenance in a way that will reduce costs for the government and lead to greater efficiency. Likewise, the LODGE Act addresses rising housing costs and overcrowding in communities adjacent to national parks by providing NPS with improved authorities to enter into partnerships to develop employee housing options. In the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, Committee Republicans will expand on these solutions and continue promoting successful examples of public-private partnerships.

<sup>32</sup> Federal Real Property: Current Efforts, GAO Recommendations, and Proposed Legislation Could Address Challenges [Reissued on June 24, 2015] (2015), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-15-688t>.

<sup>33</sup>The Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act, H.R. 3113, 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3113>. Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform Act, H.R. 5522 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5522/related-bills> (Passed into law as part of [H.R. 2617, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023](https://www.congress.gov/bills/117/2617)).

<sup>34</sup> Schnedler, Jack, “Taking ‘The Cure’: Hot Springs’ Bathhouse Row springs back to life,” Arkansas Democrat Gazette, April 4, 2021, <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/apr/04/taking-the-cure-hot-springs-bathhouse-row-springs/>.

<sup>35</sup> Partnership Agreements Creating Tangible Savings Act, H.R. 6442, 117<sup>th</sup>, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/6442>. Lodging Options Developed for Government Employees Act, H.R. 7615, 117<sup>th</sup>, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/7615/all-info>.

In addition to private entities, State, Tribal and local governments are important partners that can help reduce the burden of the federal estate by cooperating and coordinating on land and resource management activities. One excellent tool that facilitates this coordination is Good Neighbor Authority, which allows FS and BLM to authorize States, Tribes, and counties to conduct important forest, rangeland and watershed restoration work on federal lands.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, Tribes and counties have not utilized this authority as much as States because they are not authorized to retain receipts related to timber sales under GNA.<sup>37</sup> House Republicans introduced the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act to solve this problem and empower Tribes and counties to fully utilize this authority.<sup>38</sup> Many Republican forestry bills, including the FIRESHEDS Act and Save Our Sequoias (SOS) Act, also encourage expanded use of shared stewardship agreements to better involve States, Tribes, and counties in cross-boundary forest management projects.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, House Republicans plan to harness American innovation by supporting natural climate solutions. This includes the Trillion Trees Act, a House Republican proposal from last Congress that offers a pragmatic approach to tackling climate change and making forests healthier at home and across the globe. Studies have shown that planting one trillion tree globally can sequester 205 gigatons of carbon, an amount equivalent to two-thirds of all manmade emissions remaining in the atmosphere today.<sup>40</sup> The Trillion Trees Act uses a three-pronged approach of regeneration, management, and utilization to promote a healthy environment and economy. Another innovative solution is expanded use of harvested wood products. From mass timber to biochar, increased wood products utilization is a scientifically sound method of sequestering carbon while also promoting economic activity. In fact, researchers estimate that “nearly all of the roughly 65,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide that have been removed from the atmosphere to date have been sequestered using biochar.”<sup>41</sup> Promoting expanded use of products like biochar can help reduce hazardous fuels on federal lands and increase the productivity of American agriculture.

### **Conservation vs. Preservation**

As opposed to the Republican conservation agenda, Democrats consistently failed to grasp the magnitude and challenge managing our federal lands calls for and instead promote preservationist policies untethered from science or popular support. Preservationist policies prevent active land management, a multitude of outdoor recreation opportunities, and the use of natural resources such as timber, gas, oil, and minerals. A major threat to restoring proper management is the calculated strategy by extreme environmentalists to remove as many lands from multiple-use and sustained yield management as possible. This strategy has most recently been captured by the Biden Administration’s 30x30 agenda, which seeks to preserve 30 percent of the land and waters in the United States by 2030.<sup>42</sup> While the catchy taglines may be new, the overall strategy is not, as proponents of this radical agenda have sought to remove lands from multiple use through legislative and administrative action for far longer.

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<sup>36</sup> Congressional Research Service, “The Good Neighbor Authority on Federal Lands” January 11, 2023, Anne A. Riddle, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF11658?source=search>

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

<sup>38</sup> Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors, H.R. 4705, 117<sup>th</sup>, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4705/text?r=80&s=1>

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

<sup>40</sup> Science, “The global tree restoration potential,” July 2019, Bastin, et al, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aax0848>

<sup>41</sup> Ramkumar, Amrith, “Ancient Farming Practice Draws Cash From Carbon Credits,” Wall Street Journal, February 25, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ancient-farming-practice-draws-cash-from-carbon-credits-a803ae1>.

<sup>42</sup> Department of the Interior, “America the Beautiful,” <https://www.doi.gov/priorities/america-the-beautiful>

Since the enactment of the Wilderness Act in 1968, Congress has enacted 120 new laws that created new 803 wilderness areas that add up to roughly 111.7 million acres.<sup>43</sup> When legislative avenues have been blocked, activists successfully convinced Presidents to abuse the Antiquities Act of 1906 to lock up vast swaths of land under national monument designations. The Obama-Biden administration set a new standard for national monument abuse, using the Antiquities Act to unilaterally designate or expand 34 national monuments totaling a staggering 553,550,000 acres of land and water.<sup>44</sup> In a continuation of this effort, the Biden administration issued three monument designations, locking up over 2 million acres of land, and restored onerous restrictions on a Marine National Monument off the coast of New England.<sup>45</sup> Despite their apparent commitment to Tribal participation, President Biden’s recent designation of the Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument in Colorado was slammed by the Ute Tribe as “an unlawful act of genocide.”<sup>46</sup>

Despite never actually defining baseline criteria for 30x30, the White House routinely identified these national monument designations and new pieces of legislation to create wilderness as consistent with the goals of the initiative. Tellingly, the administration has repeatedly failed to clarify whether working lands conservation, multiple-use, and active management will be counted as ‘conservation’ under 30x30. Several Congressional oversight inquiries have gone unanswered by the administration, leaving confusion and uncertainty as to what the baseline metrics or definitions are for 30x30.<sup>47</sup> Concerningly, despite never defining objective metrics for 30x30, the administration rebranded this effort and announced a “\$1 billion”<sup>48</sup> “America the Beautiful Challenge” Fund in April 2022. This is a continued threat to working lands, private landowners, multiple uses of land, and a blatant misuse of precious taxpayer resources. Despite the continued references to conservation, this initiative and new Challenge Fund are nothing more than thinly veiled attempts to promote a preservationist agenda.

Unfortunately, the 30x30 Challenge Fund is not the only example of Democrats using billions of dollars of taxpayer resources to lock up more lands. Legislation like the so-called Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided billions of dollars to agencies with little to no oversight or accountability. These funds are already being used in efforts to lock up more lands, such as \$50 million to inventory mature and old growth trees.<sup>49</sup> At best, this is an exercise that will divert time and energy away from addressing the obvious and overwhelming threat to old growth – catastrophic wildfires. At worst, this inventory could lead to restrictive actions that prohibit the type of management needed to protect older forests, ironically leading to more old growth destruction. Other efforts, such as the 10 year “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis” strategy are well intentioned but have thus far failed to show significant results

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<sup>43</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Wilderness: Overview, Management, and Statistics,” July 29, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL31447>

<sup>44</sup> Congressional Research Service, “National Monuments and the Antiquities Act,” Carol Hardy Vincent, November 28, 2022, [https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R41330?source=search#\\_Ref473733653](https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R41330?source=search#_Ref473733653)

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> Dunphey, Kyle, “Ute Indian Tribe calls Biden’s Colorado national monument designation ‘an unlawful act of genocide,’” Deseret News, October 13, 2022, <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2022/10/13/23403212/ute-indian-tribe-calls-colorado-national-monument-unlawful-act-genocide-biden>.

<sup>47</sup> [https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-05-12\\_westerman\\_et\\_al\\_to\\_mallory\\_re\\_america\\_the\\_beautiful\\_challenge.pdf](https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2022-05-12_westerman_et_al_to_mallory_re_america_the_beautiful_challenge.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> While the Challenge was announced as a \$1 billion spending program, to date, over 55 percent of the funding is non-existent and questions related to where this funding would come from went unanswered.

<sup>49</sup> Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) (P.L. 117-19), Section 23001.

or transparency about how money is being spent.<sup>50</sup> Instead of spending billions of dollars to continue promoting preservationist policies, it is time to promote true conservation and unlock the full potential of our nation’s natural resources.



A wildfire burning in a wilderness area within Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park. Over two years, catastrophic wildfires have destroyed up to 19 percent of the world’s Giant Sequoias, the most iconic old growth tree on the planet, due to decades of mismanagement. **Source:** National Park Service, 2020.

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<sup>50</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Biden-Harris Administration Launches New Efforts to Address the Wildfire Crisis,” January 19, 2023, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/01/19/biden-harris-administration-launches-new-efforts-address-wildfire>