

Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick remarks
Natural Resources Committee
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS
AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION
10 a.m. - July 11, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing this morning.

The issues of forest health and management are important, but they carry a special significance right now as folks across Arizona mourn the heartbreaking loss of 19 firefighters.

These 19 young men were bravely battling the Yarnell Fire in Congressman Gosar's district when they died.

This tragedy is our nation's worst loss of first responders since 9/11.

Unfortunately, Arizona has a long history of devastating wildfires – and it's important that we learn from them and create smarter policies that protect our forests, our citizens and our firefighters.

In my Arizona district, we have millions of acres of national forest land and state land.

We've suffered from several major fires in recent years.

In 2011, the Wallow Fire was started by an abandoned campfire.

It affected Apache, Greenlee, Graham and Navajo counties. 6,000 people were evacuated.

It burned for 41 days before it was contained.

And it burned about 538,049 acres – 840 square miles -- making it the largest fire recorded in Arizona.

The estimated cost was \$109 million.

In 2010, the Schultz Fire in Northern Arizona was ignited by an abandoned campfire.

It burned more than 15,000 acres of pristine forest in about 10 days, and it forced the evacuation of more than 700 properties.

The financial impact of the Schultz Fire and its subsequent flooding reached more than \$130 million.

Research found that the impact would have been lessened had the forest been thinned before this fire broke out.

And in 2002, the Rodeo-Chedeski Fire ravaged communities in District One, forcing the evacuation of 30,000 people from places like Show Low, Pinetop-Lakeside, and Heber-Overgaard.

468,000 acres burned, and 400 homes were destroyed.

It took 20 days to contain this fire, which was started by humans.

Today's hearing occurs during the current wildfire season. Fires are raging right now in Arizona and other areas.

So we need to treat the issue of forest health and management with urgency.

Allow me to share with you with an example of something that can work.

The 4 Forest Restoration Initiative in Arizona is a collaboration of many diverse stakeholders.

This project, known as 4-FRI, took root several years ago and has come a long way since my previous term in Congress.

We brought together the timber industry, conservationists, the Forest Service and local communities from across District One.

We worked on a plan to help our forests while strengthening rural economies at minimal cost to the taxpayer.

The overall goal of 4-FRI is to restore the structure, pattern and composition of the historic fire-adapted ecosystems.

This will reduce ground fuels and it will aid forest health, wildlife and plant diversity.

The business sector plays a key role in 4-FRI by harvesting, processing and selling wood products from the foresting work.

4-FRI will create over 600 jobs and begin the restoration of 2.4 million acres of forest land.

It will help revitalize our region's timber industry – and it will greatly reduce the threat of wildfires.

4-FRI offers a model for helping our forests and our local economies.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the need for real action.

Let's do all we can to ensure our forests are healthy and to protect our communities and first responders.

Thank you.