

Good morning members of Congress, my name is Scott Lindgren and I'm the Fire Chief of the Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District on the Nevada side of beautiful Lake Tahoe. Prior to coming to Tahoe Douglas, I spent 33 years in the Fire service in California, with most of that time with CAL FIRE. My last assignment with CAL FIRE was as the Chief of the Amador El Dorado Unit. Much of my time with CAL FIRE was on Type 1 Incident Management Teams. I was qualified as an Agency Administrator, a Type 1 Incident Commander, and a Type 1 Operations Section Chief assigned to some of the largest fires and disasters in the history of California over my career. I'm also currently the Chairman of the MAC for the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team.

Our current Fire threat is no secret. Since 2015, fires in the west have been rewriting the history books every year setting records and doing things they have never done before. Every year seems to get worse and worse. We are at all-time record dryness in the Lake Tahoe Basin. I'm seeing more dead and dying trees every day in the Basin. Our fire situation is at critical mass and frankly, I'm very scared at what the next few months will bring. We almost lost this amazing place last year when the Caldor Fire made it over the Sierra Crest and into the Lake Tahoe Basin. What will this year bring?

Since the Angora Fire in 2007, there has been some good fuels reduction work done in the Tahoe Basin. All of the agencies in the Tahoe Basin have come together to try and accomplish the much-needed fuels reduction that wasn't encouraged prior by the USFS and the TRPA. The best thing going in the Basin right now is the positive relationships and coordinating among all the agencies along with the federal, state, and local funding for fuels reduction. But, make no mistake about it, we are way behind! There has been some great work done on State and private land in the Basin. But work on the USFS land is inconsistent and sloppy. This is not the fault of the USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, but more so due to lack of funding and lack of staffing. The pay and benefits for the USFS are incredibly deficient and frankly embarrassing. They have massive trouble recruiting and retaining employees. The good employees that they do have are very dedicated, but can only do so much. I have heard the promises in this year's budget to fix their pay and benefits, but from what I have recently heard from some of their employees, they have not seen any change. Why? They deserve to be paid what the state and local government fire departments make. Until the pay and benefits are fixed, you won't fix the problem. I urge you to fix their pay and benefits ASAP.

You may have heard about the Tamarack Fire that started on July 4, 2021. The USFS Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest decided to "monitor" that Fire with no fire suppression efforts for eleven days before it exploded and destroyed the forest and devastated communities in Alpine County California and Douglas County Nevada. That forest, those counties, and those people's lives will never be the same. That fire was less than 1/4 of an acre for 11 days and could have been easily put out. Some of the USFS firefighters urged their leadership to allow them to take action and put it out to no avail. The Humboldt-Toiyabe USFS leadership failed! Their decisions and lack of action were criminal!

The USFS Chief this spring sent out his annual letter of intent to his employees. In this letter he addressed some of the concerns we all have about the USFS policies and decision making on immediately suppressing fires after the Tamarack Fire catastrophe and many others. This letter

basically told us that the USFS had no intention of doing anything different this Fire season. This really upset many local government Fire Chiefs, including myself. So, we wrote our own letter of intent, which we feel is what the public expects and demands of us. Here is our letter of intent signed by over 30 Fire Chiefs in California and Northern Nevada:

“We will aggressively attack all fires within or threatening our jurisdictions. We will hit them as fast and as hard as we can when they are small. In these unprecedented conditions, we can’t afford the risk to our public, our communities, the environment, the wildlife, critical infrastructure, or our firefighters by letting these fires grow out of control. We will use every available resource and tool to keep this from happening. If and when a fire becomes out of control due to the extreme conditions and the minimal resources we have available, we will find a way to get ahead of it and stop it at all costs”.

Why can’t the USFS take a similar stance? The days of allowing fires to burn need to be over! The USFS regularly states that protection of structures are not their responsibility, so why do we continually allow them to manage large fires that destroy our communities and forests? They need your direction along with your support.

Thank you for your time.