

Testimony

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Committee on Natural Resources

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Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify regarding federal wildland fire suppression reform and Forest Service, and forest management, specifically fuel reduction and thinning in California.

I serve as President/Owner of Crabtree Forestry Consulting LLC and am a retired Forest Supervisor.

Body of the Testimony

I fully support H.R. 934 as it provides a clear message from the elected officials in this body to the agencies regarding the urgency and appropriateness of suppressing all wildfires. I can share numerous examples of wildfires I was personally involved in where we chose to allow the fires to burn under Control/Containment Guidelines. In most cases these fires burned as planned, but in other cases they did not. When fires escape their control lines the risk is transferred to surrounding properties and the additional men and women who are assembled to fight the, now larger, wildfire. I submit the following eight points for support for this bill:

- 1) Firefighting resources are limited and valuable. Committing personnel to monitoring fires that are not being actively suppressed is unwise at this time.
- 2) Fires are more extreme across this country than has been historical. Often I heard "I have never seen wildfire behavior like I saw on this fire". Things are different now. It is now particularly important now to put out wildfires when they are small.
- 3) Fire behavior and prediction models are being refined but in some cases did not accurately predict the observed behavior. This is not the time to be managing unplanned ignitions.
- 4) I am very aware that at times this bill would put a burden on firefighting resources.
- 5) The forests have had fire excluded for many decades. The condition of the forests, particularly in the West is very different than it was when the Forest Service began managing public land. Many stands are

overstocked and contain numerous dead trees. This is not a reasonable place to manage unplanned ignitions when in CA 8 of the 20 largest fires have occurred since 2020.

- 6) This bill simply directs the Forest Service to do what they used to do, to direct resources to suppress wildfire and to do prescribed burning with a higher level of planning.
- 7) Line officers can find themselves trying to find a balance between the desires of forest fire restoration advocates and fire suppression when there may not be the time and information necessary to make a reasoned decision. I have been in that position and I fully understand the importance of returning fire to the landscape. It is essential.
- 8) The agencies have used many terms and phrases to communicate what they are doing is exhausting and confusing. Fire Use, Alternative Containment strategy, Confine/ Control, Managed for Resource Benefits are all used to describe to the public what is going on. It may appear to most people that the fire is being “let burn”.

I fully support H.R. 188 as it provides a clear message from the elected officials in this body to agency officials regarding the urgency and appropriateness of fuel treatment. The bill is fully supportive of the mission of the Forest Service. I submit the following four points for support for this bill:

- 1) The agency appears to be struggling to deliver fuel treatment expectations even though they have received millions of dollars from Congress. This bill will provide additional encouragement by giving them expanded use of Categorical Exclusions.
- 2) It is critical that the work of fuel treatment be pursued aggressively. Wildfires are depleting the public’s fiber resources and putting the agency’s mission at risk.
- 3) The condition of the nation’s forests is in urgent need of fuel treatment and thinning. It is especially critical where public lands are adjacent to communities and private lands, particularly industrial forest lands.
- 4) Requiring the agency to consult with impacted parties, representatives of local governments and interested entities should not be an excessive burden to the agencies.

LAURENCE CRABTREE