

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRON-
MENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPRO-
PRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020**

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 2019

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 9:30 a.m., in room SD-124, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lisa Murkowski (Chairman) presiding.

Present: Senators Murkowski, Daines, Udall, and Merkley.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI

Senator MURKOWSKI. Good morning, everyone. The subcommittee will come to order.

Today we are reviewing the fiscal year 2020 budget proposal for the Forest Service. I am pleased to welcome Chief Vicki Christiansen to testify before us today. I am also welcoming John Rapp who serves as the Director of the Office of Strategic Planning, Budget, and Accountability at the Forest Service, accompanying the Chief. Thank you both for being with us here today.

The budget request for Forest Service for fiscal year 2020 is \$5.14 billion. This request is \$947 million less than the enacted level, not including the \$1.95 billion proposed to be made available by the wildfire budget cap adjustment. Including the wildfire cap adjustment brings the overall Forest Service total to \$7.09 billion.

Fiscal year 2020 marks the first year of availability for the wildfire cap adjustment that was created by the fiscal year 2018 Omni. The cap adjustment will allow the Forest Service to address fire suppression needs without disrupting programmatic activities.

I am pleased that we have this mechanism available, finally, to stop the fire borrowing and the repayment cycle, as well as to stop the accompanying lack of budget certainty and discipline.

The creation of the wildfire cap adjustment is about more than just adequately funding wildfire suppression. It is about making sure the Forest Service can deliver on its multiple-use mission.

Now that we have the ability to fund wildfire without fire borrowing, it is time for us to focus on working with the Service to modernize and improve your budget structure.

Securing a cap adjustment was the first phase in increasing transparency and accountability for your budgeting practices, and

the Forest Service took another important step by proposing a budget restructure in the request.

I will discuss this further in my questions, but I want to thank you, Chief and Mr. Rapp, for your willingness to work in a bipartisan and a bicameral way to improve the Service's ability to deliver results on the ground.

The request places a heavy emphasis on Secretary Perdue's Shared Stewardship Initiative. This approach recognizes that we can be better stewards of our natural resources if States, local governments, and stakeholders work together towards common goals. I do hope the Shared Stewardship Initiative will really excel in improving wildfire resiliency in and around the wildland urban interface.

Congress has routinely invested hundreds of millions of dollars annually in hazardous fuels reduction activities. I think we have some room for improvement here.

I am pleased the Forest Service recognizes the importance of investing in recreation funding, and as you know, Chief, many of our communities in Alaska rely on the recreation industry for economic diversity, particularly in the southeast region.

I am always disappointed to see subsistence activities cut in the budget request, and I want to go on record with my strong support for those activities.

The Tongass National Forest, our largest national forest, unique in character from any other, is a rainforest made up of 32 island communities. To address our unique characteristics and the challenges they present to the people who live and work there, we have been working with you and the State of Alaska on a Tongass-specific Roadless Rule.

I want to take this opportunity to reiterate yet again to you that every elected official representing Southeast Alaska supports an exemption. From the Governor, to the State legislators, to the delegation here in Congress, this has never been a partisan issue for us. Alaskans know best what it takes to meet our needs, and we need relief from the Roadless Rule as it currently stands. Without relief, our communities will continue to struggle to grow jobs and a sustainable economy that they desperately, desperately need.

As you continue to work with us on making the Tongass a working forest again, I do hope that you will use it as an opportunity to put the model of shared stewardship to work.

Thank you for being here today with us, Chief. I look forward to your testimony. Again thank you for your willingness to serve.

And with that, I turn to my colleague, Senator Udall.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR TOM UDALL

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and, Chief Christiansen, welcome. Also glad to have you before the subcommittee for the first time. We did not have that opportunity last year because we moved quickly to markup, but it is great to have you here today.

By moving quickly, Chairman Murkowski and I were able to bring the Interior bill to the Senate floor for the first time, and that is what happens when we come together. And I am hopeful we will do that the same this year.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Yes, yes.

Senator UDALL. We are committed to doing that.

I would like to commend you for taking strong public actions in response to the reports of sexual harassment and discrimination within the ranks of the Forest Service. We know there is more work to be done to change the culture and ensure a safe workplace for all staff. We are here to give you the tools and resources you need to continue that effort.

I share my Chairman's concerns about the wholly insufficient budget proposal the administration has saddled you with and sent you here to defend.

Despite all we know about a changing climate and degradation of our public lands, despite the tools we gave you in the Wildfire Suppression Funding and Forest Management Activities Act that was part of our fiscal year 2018 Omnibus, and despite the additional authorities provided in the 2018 Farm Bill, this proposed budget fails to make the investments needed to improve the conditions of our forests and watersheds or prevent pest disease and fire causing widespread havoc across the landscape.

What makes this year's request particularly troubling is that fiscal year 2020 is the first fiscal year that the Forest Service is able to utilize the fire cap adjustment. This cap adjustment allows the Forest Service to budget for a set amount of fire suppression funding, and if the fire season is a bad one, as many have been lately, additional funding outside the discretionary budget caps becomes available. This means that we are finally putting a stop to fire borrowing, which siphons dollars that ought to be spent on their intended purposes.

Access to the cap adjustment saves \$654 million we appropriated for fire suppression in fiscal year 2019 that we can now use for other needs. While the Forest Service was not assured any of these discretionary savings from the fire cap, it was my hope that the administration would use a portion to reinvest in fire prevention and forest restoration so that we get ahead of the cycle of catastrophic fires that will only burn faster and hotter as climate conditions continue to change.

So what did the administration do? They proposed a reduction of \$948 million for the Forest Service, a 16 percent cut. The budget reduces or eliminates grants for States' forest action plans, fire assistance in urban forestry, volunteer fire department assistance, and community forest conservation. It recommends \$45 million less for research, eliminating the Federal legacy in collaborative force landscape restoration programs, and no funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These programs all work together to safeguard our forests.

I am frustrated, frankly. I have seen firsthand what happens when wildfires tear through a community. In my home State, the Las Conchas and the Whitewater-Baldy fires scorched more than 300,000 acres, and this is happening all across the United States, with 8.7 million acres consumed by fire in 2018.

Both 2017 and 2015 saw over 10 million acres burned. Sadly, this is the new normal.

We here in Congress worked for years to resolve fire borrowing to free up discretionary spending for restoration, and now the administration wants to further gut the Forest Service budget.

Let us think about that for a moment. At a time when wildfires are burning record levels of acreage, the Forest Service is cutting back on programs that help prevent fires. The only significant increase in the budget proposal is \$15 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects. We all agree that removing hazardous fuels is an effective fire prevention measure, but to provide that extra \$15 million for hazardous fuels, the budget proposes to cut \$15 million from State fire assistance.

So the question is, What level of increased protection are we getting for \$15 million more in hazardous fuels projects? Does it really reduce fire risk by such a factor that we can cut State fire grants by \$15 million, volunteer fire assistance by \$6 million, and cross-boundary forest health projects by \$12 million? Even worse, the budget estimate for the number of acres that can be treated with \$450 million remains the same as fiscal year 2019 estimate of 3.4 million acres, when the budget proposed \$387 million for this activity. I do not see how that improves our fire readiness.

Congress enacted the fire cap to stop the Forest Service from turning into the fire service. I am concerned this budget would only speed up that transition. We should not jeopardize the future health of our forests by cutting programs that prevent fires through management and restoration of our National Forests and assisting States and private landowners to do the same.

One concrete step we can take is to pass a supplemental that responds to the needs of all Americans suffering from national natural disasters. Both the House and Senate versions I support include repayment of the \$720 million borrowed last year. Even though the administration has not requested repayment, it is important this funding is available for this summer.

We also need your help, Chief, to extend the fire cap beyond its initial 2-year authority. I know that your fire chief is doing her utmost to clamp down on unnecessary costs, but waste, fraud, or abuse cannot be tolerated. Stories of misuse will not help extend what is an essential tool for combating the escalating needs to fight catastrophic fires and redirecting the Forest Service budget towards land management rather than just fire suppression.

One bright spot in the budget proposal is the Public Lands Infrastructure Fund, which would support deferred maintenance needs by accessing energy development revenue not dedicated to the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

In previous iterations of this proposal, the Forest Service has been left out, but this year's proposal includes all land management agencies and Bureau of Indian Education Schools. This is a positive change. I look forward to working on this issue to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog.

I hope that working together once again, the Chairman and I can give you the resources to do the job that you and the Forest Service employees across the Country, from Hawaii to Alaska to New Mexico to Puerto Rico signed up for, and that is to help the American people enjoy and benefit from their public lands for generations to come.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Senator Udall.

Chief Christiansen, we turn to you for your comments, and then we will have plenty of time for questions this morning. Again, thank you for being here, and we look forward to your statement.

FISCAL YEAR 2020 FOREST SERVICE BUDGET PROPOSAL

STATEMENT OF VICKI CHRISTIANSEN, CHIEF, U.S. FOREST SERVICE ACCOMPANIED BY JOHN RAPP, DIRECTOR FOR STRATEGIC PLAN- NING, BUDGET, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I do deeply appreciate your support to work on improving the conditions of the Nation's forests and grasslands through active management and innovation and not doing business as usual.

Today, I will update you on three areas of our work: first, our progress in overcoming challenges and actively stewarding the forests and grasslands; our ground plan for 2020; and our work to champion a strong workforce and healthy workplace.

In terms of our work on the ground, we are seeing results. We have made good use of funds, new authorities, and tools to do more to confront the threats facing forests and communities.

We are building off a facility 20-year high in forest treatments last year, which yielded 3.2 billion feet of timber, and we also treated 3.4 million acres to reduce hazardous fuels, surpassing our annual target.

Shared stewardship is fast becoming our preferred mode for doing work. It is our best chance in improving the health of all forests.

We have reached out and worked across boundaries to reduce fire risk, improve forest conditions, and help communities.

We have executed nearly 200 good-neighbor agreements in 37 States to get more work done on the National Forests. We are forging shared stewardship agreements that set mutual goals and priorities at large scales.

Secretary Perdue signed the first stewardship agreement with the Western Governors Association. We have recently signed shared stewardship agreements with Idaho and Washington State, and more are on the way.

Internally, we are nearing completion of critical reforms that ease process burdens, reduce costs, and break the barriers that slow our work. We are completing work that streamlines the decision process and meets our environmental responsibility.

As part of this effort, we expect to release our new National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) rules later this summer. We are taking steps to be more cost effective in fire response and pursuing long-term actions to reduce costs. We are improving our financial accountability.

We have geared up to fully employ new Farm Bill authorities. They put more science-based tools in our toolbox to do more work.

Expansion of the good-neighbor authority and provisions for wood innovation will rapidly be put to good use.

The Forest Service is well positioned to build on this momentum. The President's \$5.7 billion budget places emphasis on our critical work. It focuses on reducing wildland fire risk, improving forest and grassland conditions, and contributing to rural economies. It does reflect tough choices and tradeoffs. It helps us build on a shared stewardship approach.

In fiscal year 2020, we are also pleased the first funding fix will take effect. The damaging practice of fire transfer will likely become part of the past. We will no longer sacrifice critical work to pay for firefighting.

The \$1.3 billion request for fire preparedness helps us to be ready for another tough fire year.

Lastly, our mission success depends on a highly skilled, motivated workforce. We will continue our work to end sexual harassment and retaliation.

Last year, we listened to employees. We learned from them, and we acted to bring about change. Today employees are better equipped with new tools, stricter policies, a new code of conduct, and supervisory support.

This summer, we will ban alcohol at all shared housing. These actions are necessary to achieve sustained cultural change. It will not happen as quickly as we would like, but I am determined to lead a permanent change in the Forest Service.

In turn, we will make good on the investments of this Congress and provide the services and the sound stewardship this Nation deserves.

Thank you. I am looking forward to our Q&A.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STATEMENT OF VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Udall, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's fiscal year 2020 budget request for the Forest Service.

The fiscal year 2020 President's budget for the USDA Forest Service totals nearly \$5.7 billion. Of that, \$559 million is mandatory funding. It is a good investment for the American people and will enable us to make progress in addressing the critical condition of America's forests. Up to 80 million acres of the National Forest System, about 4 in every 10 acres, are at moderate to high risk from catastrophic fire. Other threats include regional drought, invasive species, and major outbreaks of insects and disease. Stakeholders of the USDA Forest Service broadly agree on the need for active measures to address the threats across many of the landscapes we manage, and Congress has done their part to help. I appreciate the support and innovative authorities that Congress provided in the 2014 Farm Bill, the 2018 Omnibus, and the 2018 Farm Bill to help us do more to improve the conditions of our forests and grasslands and protect communities. This is an indication of Congress' expectations and trust in us, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to meet those expectations. There is much more work to be done to improve landscape resiliency for present and future generations, but we are committed to doing the right work in the right places at the right scale.

In 2018, Secretary Perdue announced a new strategy entitled, "Toward Shared Stewardship Across Landscapes: An Outcome-Based Investment Strategy" that calls for stronger collaborative decisionmaking with States and partners and employs new technology that can be shared. To do this, we will continue to reform our processes to better serve those connected to the land, improve infrastructure, and collaborate with our partners to set mutual goals and priorities to get more work done across landscapes. Use of tools like the Good Neighbor Authority, with more than 200 agreements in 37 States, 20-year stewardship contracts with cancellation ceiling relief, and other internal process improvements, including environmental analysis decisionmaking, is reducing the time and cost needed to produce high quality and science-based decisions that are accomplished effectively and efficiently. The agency

continues our work on other fiscal reforms, and identifying new reforms, to ensure accountability and credibility for every dollar we receive. In this Budget the USDA Forest Service proposes a new budget structure that will eliminate cost pools, improve transparency and accountability, and will enable efficient delivery of integrated programs at an ecosystem/landscape scale level.

Fortunately, implementation of the fiscal component of the fire funding fix begins in fiscal year 2020. The USDA Forest Service is requesting access to \$1.95 billion of the overall resources authorized in the recently enacted “wildfire cap adjustment.” This, in addition to the Suppression funding requested in the President’s budget, should dramatically reduce the need for transferring funds from our other mission programs to cover firefighting costs. Access to the wildfire cap adjustment has stabilized our budgeting environment and the President’s Budget is proposing funding increases to line items to improve the condition of our forests.

We recognize that the successful delivery of services and work starts with a highly skilled, motivated workforce. Forest Service employees remain our largest and most important investment. They are essential to confronting the arduous challenges facing America’s forests and grasslands and are integral to the services and experiences we provide to citizens and local communities. We are aware that we must do more to stop harassment, bullying and retaliation. We have taken, and continue to take, significant steps to improve policies, accountability, reporting systems, and training around the workplace environment. I want to reaffirm my commitment to continue the hard work that will improve our agency’s culture; to continue transparency before this subcommittee, Congress and the public we serve; and to achieve a workplace where all employees are treated with respect and dignity, so that they do not fear for their safety—physically or emotionally.

THE PRESIDENT’S 2020 BUDGET

The fiscal year 2020 request focuses on three primary areas: reducing wildland fire risk, improving forest and grassland conditions through shared stewardship, and contributing to rural economic prosperity. To address these focus areas, the Budget makes significant investments in the following program areas:

- \$1.34 billion is proposed for Fire Preparedness, which enables the Forest Service to maintain its existing firefighting capability and funds all base 8 salary costs for firefighters.
- \$1.011 billion is proposed for Suppression, the 2015 10-year average, base funding set by the 2018 Omnibus which will be frozen through fiscal year 2027.
- The budget seeks \$1.95 billion of the authorized wildfire funding fix cap adjustment for wildfire suppression activities.
- This, in addition to the \$1.011 billion for Suppression, would provide about \$3 billion for wildland fire suppression activities in fiscal year 2020.
- \$450 million is proposed for Hazardous Fuels, which supports the agency’s emphasis on improving the condition of the Nation’s forests and grasslands while enhancing their resilience to the negative effects of wildland fire.
- \$375 million is proposed for Forest Products, which will support the sale of 3.7 billion board feet of timber. The Forest Service is working to improve the speed and agility in the planning and execution of land management actions, including timber sales.
- \$77 million is proposed for the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program, which generates data on past, current, and projected tree inventories for all 50 States. The FIA program enables the natural resource community to understand the magnitude of changes in forest conditions and trends, and to make projections of future conditions—information which is vital to the long-term health of forests and the sustained availability of multiple uses from forests.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

The fiscal year 2020 President’s budget proposes several key legislative changes to improve our effectiveness in delivering programs and services:

- Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Reauthorization (FLREA)*: The proposal is to reauthorize the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act through September 30, 2022. The revenues collected from these recreation fees are an important source of funding to enhance the visitor experience through maintenance, operations, and improvements to recreation facilities on public lands. This is an interagency proposal with the Department of the Interior. The Triennial Report to Congress on Implementation of FLREA, published in May 2012, contained several “Considerations for the Future of the Program,” which set the foundation for the interagency proposal.

- Grazing Permits*: The proposal would amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to correct the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act amendment to FLPMA Section 402. For this section only, all National Forest System lands would be included so that grazing permits on national forests in eastern States and National Grasslands are treated equally in National Environmental Policy Act analysis of grazing permits.
- Wild and Scenic Rivers*: The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that comprehensive river management plans be prepared within 3 years following a Wild and Scenic River designation. This proposal would change the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to state that the Secretary of Agriculture shall not be in violation of Section 3(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act solely because more than 3 years have passed since a river was designated “wild and scenic” and a comprehensive river management plan has not yet been completed. If more than 3 years have passed since designation without the completion of a comprehensive river management plan, the proposal would require that a plan must be completed or appropriately updated no later than during the next forest plan revision process.
- Forest Botanical Products*: This proposal would reauthorize the Forest Botanical Products Program for charging and retaining fees for the harvest of forest botanical products. The objective of the program is to provide for the sale and harvest of forest botanical products in a sustainable manner that contributes to meeting the Nation’s demand for these goods and services. The proposal would extend the agency’s existing authority for 1 year, to September 30, 2020. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 extended this authority beyond a pilot program through September 30, 2019.
- Communication Site Program—Administrative Fee Retention*: This proposal would authorize appropriation of a new programmatic administrative fee for communications use authorizations to cover the costs of administering the Forest Service’s communications site program on National Forest System (NFS) lands. This new fee, which was authorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, subject to appropriation, would allow the agency to better manage the growing use of Forest Service lands for communications facilities to better serve its customers, emergency services, and visitors to NFS lands by providing expanded telecommunications capabilities, including cellular coverage and broadband access, to rural communities.
- Mineral Receipts; Public Land Infrastructure Fund*: This proposal allows the Forest Service to be eligible to use up to 10 percent annually from the Administration’s Public Lands Infrastructure Fund. This proposed fund was included in the Department of the Interior’s fiscal year 2020 budget request to address deferred maintenance needs. The Public Lands Infrastructure Fund would be supported by the deposit of 50 percent of all Federal energy development revenue that would otherwise be credited or deposited as miscellaneous receipts to the Treasury over the 2020–2024 period, subject to an annual limit of \$1.3 billion.
- Cost recovery Minerals*: This proposal would authorize the Forest Service to retain and spend new cost recovery fees for locatable mineral plans of operations and surface use plans of operations for oil and gas leases, and other written Forest Service authorizations relating to the disposal of locatable and leasable (but not saleable) minerals on all NFS lands. The agency currently has the authority to collect such fees but does not because we are unable to retain the fees. The provision caps the amount that may be retained at \$60 million annually. This proposal would better align the Forest Service with the Department of the Interior.
- Cost Recovery for Land Uses/Infrastructure Special Use Processing*: This proposal would change the agency’s cost recovery authority to allow the collection of funds associated with the full cost of processing a land use-related special use proposal. The amendment would authorize the agency to collect fees at the very beginning of the screening process rather than waiting until an application has been fully screened and accepted for consideration. Under the current cost recovery law, only when a proposal becomes an application is the agency able to recover costs to process the application.

Coupled with the expanded authorities Congress has provided and our internal reforms, these legislative proposals will translate to better results, and increased production and work in our Nation’s forests and grasslands.

In closing, the Forest Service’s fiscal year 2020 budget request prioritizes investments to reduce wildland fire risk, improve forest and grassland conditions through shared stewardship with our partners, and contribute to rural economic prosperity. It requires tough choices within our existing program of work and will compel us to make delivery of forest and rangeland products and services. We will also need

to ensure better cost containment and accounting for our spending. The Forest Service will continue to meet this challenge. I look forward to working with this subcommittee to fulfill the President's goals and our key responsibilities for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Chief. I appreciate that.

Let us move into questions here. I wanted to start with something that Senator Udall has raised, and this is the proposal to cut both the State fire assistance and the volunteer fire assistance.

FISCAL YEAR 2020 BUDGET CUTS

Typically, you have your State and your local agencies that are literally the first responders. As I understand it, this was true 78 percent of the time in 2018, and this was whether the fire was on State or Federal lands. But it is the State and local agencies that are there first.

These two programs trained over 119,000 firefighters last year alone and provided over \$17 million in funding for local firefighting departments to purchase new equipment or upgrade existing. Both of these programs significantly reduce the overall Federal fire suppression costs by letting the State and local departments get in there and move first, attacking these wildfires when they are small.

I am with Senator Udall on this. I just do not understand why you would undercut this funding at the State and local levels.

It seems to me that this gives you extraordinary leverage with just a little bit of funding. What is the rationale behind this cut?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thanks for being so aware of the leverage of these—the volunteer fire assistance and State fire assistance.

I can tell you as a former State forester in two different States, it is a critical partnership. You said it. It is a system in America that we have in response to wildland fire. No one organization can do it alone, and we leverage on our strengths. And, of course, the local firefighters are there immediately in community.

So there is an investment. We still have a request. Unfortunately, it is reduced because we had to make these very tough choices and tradeoffs about the conditions of America's forests and meet the administration's instructions to reduce our fiscal year 2019 budget request by 5 percent. So, in doing that, we had to get really specific and focused. It was about improving the conditions of the forests so we can reduce long term the risk from fire and to sustain rural economies. They were really tough choices. We would be happy to work with you on this.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Chief, I recognize that before you were Chief of the Forest Service, you were a firefighter on the ground, and I think you know full well that these significant reductions in these accounts send the message to those first responders at the State and local level that, "We are going to handle it on the Federal side, you guys." I do not think that that is the message that we want to send. I do not think that that is the message that these incredible men and women who really are on the front lines deserve to hear. At a time when we are conscious of the budget and need to be looking to find reductions, we should not undercut the assistance that we receive from those who are responding locally,

but instead recognize what that contribution means to that local economy.

You have said that the goal here of the administration is two-pronged. Let us focus on the prevention side, but let us also address the local economies.

I can tell you firsthand that in some of our more remote communities, it is our fire crews that are out there on the front lines. This is their whole economy during the summer; this is the income that these men and women bring back to the village after the fire season is over.

I appreciate you saying that you are going to work with us on this. I want to believe that your heart is not really into defending this cut. Please know that Senator Udall and I feel pretty strongly that this is not a place to be making a reduction like this.

Let me turn to you, Senator Udall.

Senator UDALL. Thank you. You said it so well. I could not agree more.

I think that, Chief, this is a strong message to you of where we come out on this.

Chief, we recently learned that the secure rural school payments for 2018, which Senator Murkowski and I worked to include with the fire cap authorization, were being hit with a sequester. I asked my staff to look into it, and the Budget Office told us you are correcting that decision and the counties will receive their full payments.

Can you tell me when you expect those corrected payments to be issued?

PAYMENTS TO SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. Thank you, Senator.

You are correct. There were some different interpretations on whether sequestration should be applied. That has been corrected, and we distributed the funds to the States earlier this week. And they should be hitting the actual States by the end of this week. So it has been executed.

Senator UDALL. Yes. Check is in the mail. Good.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Good.

Senator UDALL. Okay.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. "In the ether," I think it is called now.

Senator UDALL. Yes. Okay.

And I know you have been through this a lot, but the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) monies are very, very important for education, for law enforcement, for those kinds of needs, and so we just need to make sure they know that they are going to be getting them.

As I stated in my remarks, I am very focused on ensuring that the fire cap last beyond its current 2-year authorization for fiscal year 2020 and fiscal year 2021, but to do that, we need the Forest Service to be extra judicious in spending fire dollars. We need your help to show that this funding is spent well so that we can retain the authority.

Chief, will you commit to us that you will keep a watchful eye on fire spending and will give your budget director and fire director

the tools they need to track and manage these expenditures so that every dollar is a dollar well spent?

FIRE CAP FUNDING

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Absolutely, Senator. We have a wildland fire system improvement plan that I get briefed on regularly. We know that Congress has put faith in us as a Forest Service that we will be a good investment, both how we get after improving the conditions and doing the prevention on the ground, but that we do not see this new account as a blank check. So we have several things in play on accountability, good decisions, and really ensuring that our contracts are right-sized. We do not want to not be ready for fire season, but that we have the right resources, right place, and we are ready.

And I would be more than happy to come up and brief you more on what we are doing on that front.

Senator UDALL. Thank you. Thank you very much.

How does the President's budget enable the Forest Service to adequately address the pace and scale necessary to restore America's forests and begin reducing the dominating focus of the service on fire suppression?

RESTORING AMERICA'S FORESTS

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you. You have asked the heart of the question that we are really working hard on.

Our forests across the Nation are in peril. We all know that, and we need to really work on treating the right acres that are going to do the most to reduce risk. So it is not about just treating the most acres necessarily; it is treating the right acres. That is really the call to action in this shared stewardship framework.

Alaska's needs are going to be slightly different than New Mexico's needs, as an example, and we want to be in conversation, convening the partners at the State level to talk about that. So that is number one. It is our approach, and it is not from a Federal dominance. It is that we are all in this together. So we want to look together at the landscape.

Additionally, as we just talked about, it is about putting our focus in improving the conditions and, quite frankly, the resiliency of these forests because without these forests, all those other benefits that so many different people care about—recreation, water, hunting and fishing, subsistence, and everything else are going to be compromised significantly. So we are really laser-focused about reducing the risk on the landscape, but this takes all of us.

We know we cannot just keep spending all our money on the increasing complexity of fire. It is more complex, but we need to demonstrate that we are making good decisions and we are in partnership with our local communities on how we make those decisions on wildland fire.

So we are working on several fronts, Senator, to find the right balance to really make a difference on the landscape.

Senator UDALL. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you so much for your taking on many challenges in managing our National Forests, and I may be weighing in on very similar topics to my colleagues. Fire is just an enormous threat to the Pacific Northwest.

We have had two summers, 2017 and 2018, with a lot of fires, a much longer fire season, more fires burned, and a lot more smoke damage. Of course, at the same time that we had risk to towns in Oregon, we had devastating fires in California, including the Paradise fire.

Senator Widen and I were very pleased to see the fix to fire borrowing. Do you support extending that fix beyond a 2-year period?

EXTENDING FIRE FIX CAP

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Absolutely. We are going to do everything we can to show that we are a good investment and that we can make a difference on the ground because you all did not do it just out of the kindness of your heart. You expect a difference.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, it makes a big difference if the Forest Service is not continuously put into a situation of borrowing against all of its other programs in order to fight fires, a situation we have seen so often, and many of us have had to work together to try to refund the deficit run-up with the Forest Service in that fashion. But interrupting those programs makes no sense.

This also frees up, in the discretionary budget, hundreds of millions of dollars. Do you think we should put those hundreds of millions into preventing fires in the first place, through thinning and fuels treatments in our forests?

HAZARDOUS FUELS TREATMENT

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Senator, we clearly need to focus and get more work done on the ground. I do not think there is any denying that.

In this budget proposal, we had to make some very difficult choices and tradeoffs, following the administration's instructions of reducing by 5 percent or 2020 proposal from the 2019 proposal, and where we did put the focus was on improving the conditions of the forests to reduce the wildland fire risk and to sustaining rural economies. So that is how you will see this budget request was shaped up.

We will always be able to use more resources to get good work done on the ground.

Senator MERKLEY. So I did not really see that in your budget. I saw a slight increase in the vegetation management account, the modest increase of \$15 million, and yet there is hundreds of millions of dollars available with this change and the cap.

I also saw a devastating of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. We have three collaboratives in Oregon. The authorizing committees have doubled the amount of money that can be appropriated. So we added \$40 million to \$40 million to \$80 million, and you cut \$40 million out of \$40 million to zero. And these collaboratives have brought the two sides of the conversation, the timber community, the environmental community, and all the local stakeholders into the same room, work out prescriptions,

stayed out of the courts, and done a tremendous amount of thinning and fuels reduction that makes the forest healthier.

So since this is one of the really big wins in ending the timber wars and improving the health of our forests, why is the account zeroed out?

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROGRAM

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Senator, you are absolutely right about the collaborative efforts across the Nation, particularly in the Northwest but many other places, and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). It has been a great success. It brings common shared values together and support for holistic treatments on the ground.

With that said, because there is not a specific request for CFLRP does not mean we will not continue to fund those efforts. It is just in our regular line items.

You are not going to see a lot of plus-ups in the request because, again, we needed to reduce by 5 percent of our 2019 request. So in making those tough choices, we focused keeping stable our forest vegetation and watershed management and hazardous fuels lines.

Senator MERKLEY. I am almost out of time. So I will jump to one other piece of this, which then—if in fact we do not have a 5 percent cut because Congress bipartisan way weighs in and says reducing the fire risk in our forest is extremely important, do you think the collaboratives are a very important, valuable contribution to the work we are doing?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Absolutely. We could not do the amount of work we are doing without them.

Senator MERKLEY. And if we can find the money, that we should do a lot more work on the front end, rather than just fighting the fires on the back end?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We will always work to do the mitigation, prevention, and with the best investment intentions possible.

Senator MERKLEY. To give you an example, in Oregon, we have 2.2 million acres that have been cleared environmentally. A lot of people think, oh, it is the environmental rules. No, we have 2.2 million acres ready for fuels treatment. It is all an issue of whether or not we have the programs to fund that work, and that means good jobs in the woods, jobs in the logging trucks, jobs in the mill, greater fire resistant, a better forest for ecosystem, and a better forest for timber production. It is a win all the way around.

When we have something that is a win on so many fronts, I want to see us do more of it, not less.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I agree. Thank you, Senator.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Senator.

Spruce bark beetle is back in Alaska, and they are on steroids this time. When they were in the State about 15 years ago they really decimated so many parts of the Kenai Peninsula, and now they have moved northward into South Central.

About a million acres have been infested in the Mat-Su Valley and down on the Kenai Peninsula, and we have had two very popular campgrounds that have been completely closed before they were even opened because of what we are seeing with the beetle kill.

I understand that the next round of monitoring flyovers in July are expected to increase what we have assessed that has been damaged and destroyed already.

As we talk about ways that we are going to be preventing fire, one of the problems with this beetle kill is that it destroys the health of the tree and makes them more vulnerable to these fires when they come through. Yet, the budget proposes a 25 percent cut to the Forest Service Western Bark Beetle Initiative.

So I am asking the same question that I did before. Is this a smart reductions? We do not have any projects in Alaska under the 2014 Farm Bill insect and disease area authority. I do not understand why.

I do not understand cuts to these types of programs. This is not just in Alaska—we will hear it in Montana and Colorado and other parts around the West where the spruce bark beetle or different iterations of these insects are causing extensive damage.

Can you speak to me about what it is that we are doing within Forest Service to ensure that we have adequate resources there to provide for more robust tree removal, fire break, fuel breaks, and also including the community wildfire protection plans?

SPRUCE BARK BEETLE

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Senator.

First, I will definitely reinforce how you describe the situation with the spruce beetle in the Mat-Su and the Kenai. It has accelerated extensively over the last 3 years.

I am pleased to say it is primarily on private lands, and I will get back to the funding here in a minute.

But our mission is to help sustain the Nation's forests and grasslands, and we do that with and through other folks.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Those private lands are right next to your lands.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. They are right next to our lands, but we—

Senator MURKOWSKI. The bugs do not care.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. And just like fire, they do not respect boundaries.

So what we were able to do immediately was to use \$2 million from our State and Private Forestry funds in addition to the western bark beetle funds, was to put these funds into Alaska in an all-out effort, collaborative way, that we are working on together.

We signed a new good-neighbor agreement with the Chugach so we can do some cross-boundary work, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Parks, and Forestry and we are all being proactive instead of waiting for the disastrous fire and the damaging windfall to people and structures.

We are investing in the critical work that needs to be done to do fuel breaks and to take out the hazardous trees.

On the research and development side, this is the other piece that the Forest Service helps provide. There is a couple trials of treatments. It is systemic insecticides and an anti-aggregate pheromones. Now, I do not know a lot about those yet, but we are doing some trials up there to see if there are some ways we can naturally help get it back.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Are those sprayed, or how do you apply that?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I can get back to you on that. I do not have full understanding of them. The pheromones are not. The insecticides, I am not sure about.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Yes. If you can have somebody let us know what it is we are talking about.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We will get you more information.

[The information follows:]

More info on systemic insecticide and anti-aggregate pheromone (for treating AK spruce bark beetle). Answer below:

- Both techniques are still experimental.
- Systemic insecticides are chemicals injected into the trunks of healthy spruce trees to protect them against attacks by spruce beetles. These insecticides are being tested to see how effective they are in protecting individual trees in high value situations, such as campgrounds or suburban landscapes. These would not be used in large-scale forest situations.
- Anti-aggregation pheromones can treat larger areas. They are beetle-produced chemicals that repel beetles from attacking trees, and are being tested for effectiveness in protecting high value trees or possibly forest landscapes. This is still in the early stages of experimentation and FS R&D is working with the State assess effectiveness.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN [continuing]. But, anyway, our researchers are up there because we are looking about how to keep the natural beetles, of course, but how to keep them in balance.

FOREST HEALTH MANAGEMENT

In respect to the funding, we have two items with forest health. It is forest health on the national, forest system, and forest health cooperative, meaning for all lands.

We treat them as a bundle because fires know no boundaries, but the cooperative forest health is to invest and leverage with the State fund so that we can, again, address a landscape-scale problem.

Unfortunately, I have said it before, we had to make some tough choices and tradeoffs. So the cooperative forest health was reduced, not because we do not recognize there is a problem, but we had to make some tough choices. We will always be as effective as we can with our investments leveraging really good partnerships. I think there are some good ones in Alaska.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, you know that for us, it is not a situation of if we want to partner. We know we have to, but again, as I think of those ways that we can help the Federal Government save money, the more we can put into the up-front for the prevention the better it will be in the end. And I think every one of my colleagues on this subcommittee would agree that those are monies that are well spent.

Let me go to Senator Daines.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall.

Chief Christiansen, welcome.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Hi.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Senator DAINES. Good to see you.

I will tell you I do appreciate your 2020 budget's focus on hazardous fuels reduction. It is a big deal in Montana, reducing wild-fire risk. I am disappointed that the administration has zeroed out the very important Land and Water Conservation Fund. I mean, this is following a 92-to-8 vote in the Senate to permanently authorize LWCF. I frankly found that like a slap in the face when we saw that come from the administration. Very disappointing.

This is a critical tool to help facilitate and increase access to public lands in places like Montana for outdoor recreation, protecting our State's iconic wildlife habitat, our water quality, providing a steady supply of timber to many of our mills who are struggling to survive.

In fact, one of the great stats in LWCF, it has funded over 70 percent of the fishing accesses across Montana, have come through LWCF. Many of Montana's LWCF projects are actually Forest Service projects. Congress made a historic step protecting this program by enacting permanent reauthorization in a bipartisan public lands package.

In fact, there are a few things that unite Congress anymore. This public lands package was one of them, and LWCF was an anchor part of that important bill.

I think it is time that we now back up that vote that we saw earlier this year with full mandatory funding.

The House appropriators are taking a strong step forward by funding LWCF more than it has been funded in 15 years. I am glad to see that. I hope this subcommittee will follow suit, and as we do that, we will need the Forest Service to ensure that projects are adequately assessed and ranked to ensure the funding can be implemented.

And I know for certain, though the administration zeroed it out, I guarantee you this subcommittee will fund LWCF in a much more robust fashion. I would like to see permanent mandatory ultimately, but as we continue that fight, in the meantime, we need to keep bumping the funding up through this subcommittee.

So my question, Chief, is, will you commit to us today to work with us to ensure that our increased funding can be implemented effectively and quickly?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Senator, yes. And let me just say that we too understand the extreme importance of access to our public lands, and I want to acknowledge the work that Congress did on the public lands package. It is really significant.

We submitted the list of projects, and there is a wealth of projects earlier this month to this subcommittee. So we stand ready to implement what Congress would fund.

Senator DAINES. Thank you. I look forward to working with you on that, Chief.

MULTI-USE RECREATION

Shifting gears for a moment, Chief, in Montana, we are seeing a decrease in multiple-use recreation in our National Forests. As a U.S. Senator who spends probably more time in wilderness areas than probably any Senator here, I spent a lot of time above 9,000 feet, at times above 10,000 feet, every summer than most Members of Congress, I certainly appreciate the value of balanced use of our

public lands, and too often, though, I hear across our State about diminished access to our treasured public lands because not everyone can climb to 10,000 feet with a 40- to 50-pound backpack on their back.

I am thankful I still can. Someday there will be a point where I cannot. Specifically, forest plans in the Bitterroot and elsewhere are locking out historic uses, such as mountain biking, such as snow mobiling in areas that are not designated as wilderness. These are trails that some families have used literally for generations, and now they are banned from that area.

I recently wrote to you on March 7 regarding a very troubling statement in a planning document stating that managing for mountain biking, quote, was extremely challenging, end quote, and suggesting it should be avoided. However, I am happy to receive your agency's response just last night and that you are meeting with cycling groups to explore more opportunities in the forests prior to finalization of the Travel and Management Plan.

I can tell you that is welcome news for Montana's recreation community. We are trying to strike a balance there, truly, because we have competing interests and so forth across our community.

My question is, Can I get your commitment to work with these recreation groups and to support some of the longstanding and existing access opportunities as you update this as well as other forest plans?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Absolutely, Senator.

As I said, we recognize the importance of access, and it is balancing our multiple-use mandates. It is about sitting down and working this out together, and we will always commit to that. And under my watch, it will be a priority.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Chief.

HASSELL REPORT

Senator MURKOWSKI. Senator Udall.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chief Christiansen, I know that you have experience in the Southwest as Arizona State forester and that you have visited New Mexico, but I want you to know that you—but I want to know whether you are familiar with the Hassell Report, which sets out ways for the Forest Service to recognize the unique cultural heritage in New Mexico and how to make the resources of National Forests and the work they generate contribute more effectively in local communities—are you familiar with that report?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I am familiar with that report. That really calls out the cycle and mistrust that we are working to be very aware, sensitively aware of the needs of the natives of New Mexico.

Senator UDALL. I think your answer is very good. It is a 50-year-old document, and while some of the statements within it are outdated and others are inaccurate, I believe it continues to give valuable insights into how we view our land and how it should be managed.

I think it should be required reading for all Forest Service employees, not just those working in New Mexico, because it sets out a framework for collaboration and building trust between a community and the Forest Service.

So I want you to know that Cal Joyner, our Regional Forester, is putting these recommendations to work, and people that he is working with are very happy. In the 6 years Cal has been our Regional Forester, he has made sure that the Forest Service works hand in hand with land grants and acequias that are unique to New Mexico. On everything from forest plan revisions to guidance on maintenance and repairs, Cal and his staff have conducted extensive outreach to make sure our local traditional communities have the opportunity for meaningful input. It is not an easy balancing act, but I really appreciate the work that you and he are doing on that.

2018 FARM BILL—NEW AUTHORITY

I wanted to get a question in here on the new authority you received under the Farm Bill, the 2018 Farm Bill that we just passed. It allowed the Forest Service to enter into 638 contracts with Tribes for forestry work on adjacent public lands. Do you have a timeline for when the agency will start contracting with Tribes using this new 638 authority? Do you support this new authority, and are you going to be using it soon?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Senator.

Yes, we support the new authority. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has had it for many years, and that we can use this authority.

We are working. I have a Farm Bill task group focused on implementation, and we will have a template by early summer, and then, of course, it is building the relationships. We have the relationships with the Pueblos and Tribes in New Mexico, but we need to have a willing partner.

So we are making sure we stand ready to do those 638 or self-determination contracts as quickly as possible.

Senator UDALL. Great. Thank you.

I noticed today you are actually doing a listening session between 1:00 and 2:30 eastern time on this specific subject.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. You bet, we are.

Senator UDALL. So you are out there working on it.

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

In 2018—this is the questions on wildlife corridors. In 2018, Secretary Zinke issued a secretarial order relating to improving habitat for big game species in their winter range and migration corridors, but the goals in implementation of that order does not apply to the Forest Service.

I believe the Forest Service plays a crucial role in maintaining the natural habitats and connectivity corridors for all native wildlife, including big game. Would you agree with that? What more could the Forest Service do in conjunction with other land managers to maintain wildlife corridors?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. Thank you. We are certainly part of the landscape and are well aware and working at the local and regional level on that secretarial order together. It does not happen just on Interior lands.

So we have rolled up our sleeves, and we are doing shared planning together with our partners.

Senator UDALL. Great. Thank you.

I think you are probably well aware of the U.N. report that came out in terms of the endangered species. So I think it is important that all of our public land managers and the Forest Service be aware of that and try to work on this corridors issue.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

TIMBER IN THE TONGASS

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Senator.

Chief, let me follow up on a conversation that we had about timber in the Tongass last month when you testified before the Energy Committee, talking about the 10-year history of timber volume offered and sold and how that relates to the volume target set for each year.

Can you explain, as you review this history every year, the volume offered? And outside of 2017, how much of that volume is a reoffer of sales from prior years that did not sell? Do you have that information?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Senator, I do not have that specific information. I do not want to guess.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, please help me with understanding that. I am looking to understand what would have been a reoffer from prior years, and then going forward, if those were reoffers, why would the Forest Service expect that these reoffered sales are going to be of interest to the industry now?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. No, I understand your question.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I am trying to understand where we are with the volumes.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. So let me speak in generalities, but I want to make sure we confirm specifics.

We do not just offer and then hope for a different result a few months later and offer again. We will look at all of the factors of why.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Why it was not interesting in the first place.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. There are times it might be market forces, but there are many other times, at least part of why it did not get a purchaser, it did not get a bid would be because we required too much or it is how we designed the sale or too much roadwork, whatever it might be. So we will take a critical review and we have folks that come in and do a review to say what is it that this needs to have a viability to be a viable sale in the future.

So we will retool them is usually what we call them based on the factors we know of why they did not get a bid.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Do you take feedback or input from the industry as to why—

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Oh, absolutely.

Senator MURKOWSKI [continuing]. It was of no interest in the first place?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. I just want to make sure that I have an accurate understanding of your description of what is happening on the ground in the Tongass right now.

The timber sale program within the Tongass includes both old growth and young growth, and since the 2016 plan was adopted, Forest Service has not even come close to meeting the annual volume target. The volume offered is approximately 66 percent of the target, but the key figure, which is the volume sold, is only 31 percent of the target. And these statistics just continue to go downhill if you look at just the old growth volume sold. That is only 22 percent of the target.

My assessment is that the Forest Service continues to struggle with its effort to identify, design, and sell economic timber sales within the Tongass. The new forest plan, the conservation overlays between the Tongass 77 and The Nature Conservancy conservation priority areas in these plans and the loss then of those areas with the Roadless exemption—these have all come together to contribute to a shrinking land base that makes it difficult to actually practice active forest management.

I think this last planning round has pushed the Forest Service over the edge, and even in the best of circumstances, implementation is failing to produce sufficient timber in terms of volume to sustain the industry and the community.

Am I giving an accurate description of where we are in the Tongass today with these overlays and what that actually takes off the table in terms of anything that could be considered an economic sale?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I would frame it slightly different in the short term and in the longer term.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. In the short term you are absolutely right about the challenges. In the short term, we have lands to operate on.

Senator MURKOWSKI. We would agree that that is both a very short term.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, I am talking about the next 15 to 25 years.

We have taken on efforts for two large landscape assessments so we can have the clearance and be ready to provide volume, both old growth and the second growth, in the years to come.

The Prince of Wales landscape assessment was really a diverse collaborative, came together to look at the multiple values, including old growth timber and the second growth. I just spoke with our regional forester here in the last week, and they have made the shifts. They have 40 million board feet, and it being old growth, predominantly old growth, to put up for sale, and about 20 percent of that was helicopter logging.

They have re-shifted, and they have retooled.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Right. Because we no longer have the helicopter.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Have the helicopter contract.

So now it is to design a sale that can be sold.

We are working in earnest, and it is a challenge. I would be glad to work with you more, even come up to Alaska, so that we can roll up our sleeves and really look at this.

Now, for the longer term, we know that there are changes that need to be made to the new plans, some common sense changes,

the TU-77 streams, and the CAR soils. Now that we have the Tongass Roadless under way and the Prince of Wales and Central Tongass large landscape, we are working on those amendments so that we can—what we have total agreement on, so we can have more access to lands in the longer term.

Those plan amendments should be done in the next 6 to 9 months.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, we do have a great deal to work on. We have had a couple of good sit-downs with the Secretary to try to reinforce with him why a total exemption to the Roadless is what makes sense in the Tongass and to convey that with every overlay, whether it is the implications of the Roadless, whether it is the Tongass 77, whether it is the conservation priority areas, with each one of these, you take off the table an opportunity for a level of access and volume that then puts you below these targets that we have set. And they might look good on paper, but our ability to actually see them translate, it is almost imaginary. And imaginary does not help the economy. Imaginary does not keep these small operators around.

The reality is the industry has changed so much. It is hard for me to even describe it as an industry anymore. We lost the last helicopter operator who basically picked up their assets and moved out of State. We as a small operator cannot make it work in our Nation's largest National Forest.

I welcome you up to the State anytime, summer, winter, spring, fall, but I do appreciate your effort and your willingness along with your acknowledgement of what goes on in the forest to try to work with us.

We are trying to balance some things. You mentioned the Prince of Wales, the pilot sale. That collaborative was embraced by a lot of people, and I thought it was a good outcome. And now, of course, that too is being challenged.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. No good deed goes unpunished, I guess. We are just trying to stay alive down there in Tongass.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I understand, and I am really committed to keep digging deeper and working on this.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. Thank you.

Senator Udall.

FOREST RESTORATION PROJECTS

Senator UDALL. Chief, the science continues to show us the changes in our forests play a significant role in climate change. Forest loss can both be cause and effect of climate change. Conversely, restoring forests can sequester carbon and stabilize our ecosystems. In fact, our National Forests absorb 119 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions, about the amount produced by 25 million cars.

Chief, what programs in this budget will increase the Forest Service's reforestation efforts, and do you have a plan to tackle the backlog of forest restoration projects?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you for bringing that up, Senator.

A number that stays up front in my head is the forests in the U.S. sequester 12 percent of the carbon emissions in this Nation. That is not insignificant, and it shows the value of healthy forests.

You are correct. We have a significant backlog in reforestation, and that is largely because of the significant wildfire, catastrophic wildfire events.

We have over 775 million acres that need to be planted, and unfortunately, we are not able to keep up. That has been extremely exacerbated by the fire borrowing and the lack of repayment.

Where we take those funds when we have to borrow to pay the historical fire bill from last year was out of the trust accounts. Those are the accounts that go back into the forests after they harvest to do the reforestation, and 720 million acres were borrowed. And we have yet to be repaid. So it has really put us back in being able to get that critical work done in the ground.

In regards to the budget request, you did not see a huge increase. Again, it was because of the really difficult choices. So there is a need there, and I appreciate your concern.

Senator UDALL. And we would like to work with you on that.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. You bet.

Senator UDALL. I think we are working on legislation on that too.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Appreciate that.

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Senator UDALL. On the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration, another proposed elimination I mentioned in my opening statement is dedicated funding for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration, also known as the CFLR. This program funds 23 projects, as you know, across the country, projects in many States represented on this subcommittee, including California, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, and Oregon.

We also have two very important projects in New Mexico, in the Southwest Jemez and Zuni Mountains. These projects have brought together public and private land managers, conservationists, and Pueblos in a way that benefits both forest ecosystems and local economies.

The budget states that the projects are duplicative because other Forest Service programs do restoration work on National Forest system lands.

Am I to understand that the Forest Service would walk away from these CFLR projects if this budget were adopted?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Senator, no, you are not to assume that, and you are correct. They are extremely successful in bringing a landscape view and landscape results.

I have been to both of those projects in New Mexico, and it is amazing what it does to help bring those communities together and to have multiple facets of success.

So we are shifting in the Forest Service that we did not have to incentivize, come together and be collaborative, and there might be some additional money. I mean, that is the good side of it. That is what we mean by shared stewardship. It is a way we have to do business.

So, in that respect, the last 10 years of having this CFLRP stepped up our game, and it is changing the mindset within our own organization of what it takes to be successful.

Senator Murkowski and I have had many conversations about the communities of Southeast Alaska. We have to be a part of that.

So that is the good news, and so we will still have an expectation that we do work that way. We will just take the funding out of our regular line items and make those a priority.

Senator UDALL. Thank you.

RECREATION—ALLOCATED USE AREAS

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Chief.

There is a lot of talk right now up in the State about opportunities for new recreational areas on our Forest Service lands. It is springtime, going into this season, and we have got a lot of tourists.

I have been asking for a map that shows the distribution and allocated use of the outfitter and guide special use permitted areas on the Tongass. We have been asking for about a year now. We have not received anything.

It is my understanding that when an outfitter or guide goes through the application process for a permit, they actually sit down with the Forest Service folks there in the community, and they go over maps that show where the permitted areas are.

I do not understand why it has been so hard to get a map on these recreation-allocated use areas. Can you check into that for me?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Absolutely. I was not aware myself of that request. I will absolutely put my emphasis point on that.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. Yes. Like I say, they exist when they are in the State, but what we would like is to have that bigger map.

Do you know if these types of maps are digitized so that information is available and accessible?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I am sure they are likely digitized, Senator. If your question is are they publicly available, that I do not know.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, if you can just check on the status of the map—

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, absolutely.

Senator MURKOWSKI [continuing]. That would be appreciated.

CHUGACH—NATIONAL FOREST

I talked about the Tongass a lot, but I should also address our equally significant forest, the Chugach National Forest. It is undergoing a long overdue land and resource management plan revision. It dates back to 2002.

Last summer, a DEIS was published. That comment period closed in November. I heard from a lot of folks in the State that the plan does not provide enough access for all of the multiple uses that are advocated by the forest users.

In particular, many are concerned that the draft plan does not provide enough access, whether for timber harvest, mineral, or recreational activities.

What is the status on the plan revision? I know there were some concerns raised by some of our native corporations about the application of the Roadless rule in context of the plan revision. I do not know whether you are anticipating any changes in management to the Roadless area in the Chugach, but if you can discuss where we are with the plan?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I can certainly discuss the process. You are right, the draft environmental impact statement draft plan is out, and that is why it is out, is to receive public review and comment.

Again, in talking with our regional forester last week, he is personally watching over this process and ensuring that the comments received are truly integrated in the best way we can in the final plan.

So similar things to what you just summarized that you are hearing, we have heard as well.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Including on the Roadless?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, yes. We have heard those things, but all of that input will be considered, and you will see a difference, I am sure, in the final plan.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Any indication in terms of when we might see that?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. Factoring in the process, to resolve differences, we hope to have the final plan out by early fall of this year.

FIRE BORROWING REPAYMENT

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. The last question for me relates to where we are, given the fact that we have not been able to resolve the disaster supplemental. There has been discussion about how the Forest Service is made whole for the fire borrowing from last year, and we recognize that those funds represent critical wildfire spending. They also represent other important work that went undone because we did not have access to the wildfire cap adjustment.

I am hopeful that we will have a final deal soon on the supplemental that would include the fire borrowing repayment, but I want to make sure that I understand what Forest Service is planning for the fire season if we do not pass a supplemental before the fire season really kicks into high gear.

I did not think, quite honestly, that we would be sitting here on May 15 and not have been able to sign off on a disaster supplemental. I have been surprised that we are having this conversation right now.

But can you share with me any steps that you are taking to prepare for wildfire season, given the uncertainty of the fire borrowing repayment? And then share with the subcommittee the consequences of those funds not being repaid to date and the consequences for the remainder of the fiscal year if we are not able to pay them.

I know that this is all worst-case scenario, but we are supposed to plan around here too.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Senator, thank you so much for the question. This is one of the things that does keep me up at night.

You are right. There are twofold concerns. One is that we are unable to get the amount of work done on the ground.

I have pushed our folks in the field and said you have got to plan like you have it, and so they are stepping up and putting strike teams out there and all the rest of it to get work.

Senator MURKOWSKI. That is good because we do not want them sitting and waiting until we get the okay from Washington, D.C.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, right, but now I said the money is coming, and the money is not there. So they have had to switch to appropriations.

The bottom line is it has had an effect for this year of getting less work done, but the other big question that you point out is these accounts will not be replenished, which is where we normally draw from for the borrowing activity. As you know, it is one more year that we have to deal with potential fire borrowing.

The projections for fire for this season are again a wide range, but it is significant. It is from \$1.6 billion to \$2.8 billion fire year. We have \$1.7 billion for suppression.

So you set it up, absolutely. The likelihood that we will be in a transfer situation is significant for this year, and without having those accounts replenished that we could draw from, again, for the borrowing, we are having to put together drastic plan scenarios that would include de-obligating contracts and agreements that we already have on the ground because there is no other place to pull those funds from.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, I guess that is a clear warning to us of the consequences. Hopefully, that is a scenario that we are not going to see. I am glad that you are planning.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We are.

Senator MURKOWSKI. But it does hurt to hear that as we are anticipating yet another ugly and potentially very disastrous fire season, we have not been able to operate at 100 percent because of where we are with this fire borrowing situation.

Senator Daines, Senator Udall and I are prepared to wrap and go over to yet another approps hearing. If you would like to close it out, you are certainly welcome to do so.

Senator DAINES. I have one question for the Chief.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, you have now got the gavel too, so you can have two questions.

Senator DAINES. Is that right?

Senator MURKOWSKI. Chief, thank you.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Chief.

Senator DAINES [presiding]. Good. All right. Forest management is so important for Montana. I need to come back and ask another question. I ran out of time in the first round.

I really appreciate your 2020's budget focus on reducing wildland fire risk. I too, like Members of this subcommittee, want to make sure the Forest Service has all the tools it needs to make our communities safer.

We have taken some major steps if you look back at the 2014 Farm Bill, the 2018 Omnibus, the 2018 Farm Bill, but like you stated very clearly in your testimony, there is a lot of work left to be done.

In fact, a 2007 study from the Pacific Biodiversity Institute found that 95 percent of human-caused fires started within one-half mile of a road. It seems very logical to me that we should prioritize establishing effective fuel breaks alongside roads, particularly those in or near the wildland urban interface.

My question is, Do you agree that creating healthy forests alongside Forest Service roads can help lessen wildfire risks and protect at-risk communities?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, Senator. It is all about placing those strategic fuel breaks, and the data does show that oftentimes the most strategic place for those fuel breaks, because of how the land form is and how the fires would burn but also from where the starts could be, as you said, are along roads.

In fact, we have entered into a good-neighbor agreement with the California Department of Transportation so we can work together on just that.

Senator DAINES. Yes, 95 percent is a very compelling statistic.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. It is.

Senator DAINES. My follow-up on that would be, then, would you work with me to create a new statutory authority that expedites much needed treatments near roads?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We would be glad to work with you on ability to get more strategic work done on the ground. That is a good way to do that.

Senator DAINES. Thank you, Chief.

I have the gavel now.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. You have the gavel.

Senator DAINES. I do. Now I just got to get the right script.

ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

So we will be keeping the record open for a week for questions that need to be placed on the record.

[The following questions were not asked at the hearing, but were submitted to the Forest Service for response subsequent to the hearing:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO VICKI CHRISTIANSEN

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TOM UDALL

Question 1. The Boundary Waters Canoe Areas Wilderness Act requires the Forest Service to minimize the environmental impacts to the Boundary Waters, including impacts to water quality, of mineral development in the Superior National Forest. And the Forest Service has clear statutory consent rights in 16 U.S.C. 508(b) for mineral leasing activities on the Superior National Forest.

1a. How is the Forest Service protecting its statutory consent rights and living up its obligations under the Boundary Waters Act?

Answer. The Boundary Waters Act (16 U.S.C. 508(b)) and other relevant authorities, require the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to receive Forest Service consent prior to the issuance of any hardrock prospecting permits or leases within the Superior National Forest. The Agency's position is that, if consent is granted, the Forest Service may prescribe terms and conditions or stipulations in the permit or lease for the protection of surface resources, including resources associated with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Any such consent, and related stipulations, is provided on a case-by-case basis, affording site-specific opportunity for surface resource protection.

For the recently-renewed hardrock leases issued to Twin Metals Minnesota, the Forest Service prescribed stipulations for surface resource protection even

though the Department of the Interior had concluded that the lessee was entitled to a non-discretionary third renewal of the leases. The renewed leases also provided for joint approval by the BLM and the Forest Service for any mining plan of operation (MPO) proposed by the lessee. When an MPO is submitted by the lessee, the Forest Service will analyze potential impacts to BWCAW characteristics, including potential impacts to water resources within the Wilderness, and may prescribe additional requirements as needed to protect those resources as necessary. Additionally, the Forest Service stipulations in the renewed leases expressly reserve the exercise of the Forest Service's consent concerning any future lease renewal requests, which includes another opportunity to provide additional Forest Service stipulations to protect surface resources.

1b. Has BLM engaged the Forest Service on revisions to the 1984 Interagency Agreement between the BLM and Forest Service for Mineral Leasing, and what are the status of those revisions?

Answer. Yes. In 2017, the Forest Service and BLM worked to finalize a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) specific to Non-Coal Solid Leasable Minerals that would supersede the 1984 Interagency Agreement for Mineral Leasing. The agencies agreed at that time to defer further work on the MOU until BLM could permanently fill its national-level solid leasable minerals subject matter expert position. The minerals subject matter expert position has yet to be filled. Consequently, the MOU remains in draft form awaiting final review and agreement.

Question 2. The fiscal year 2020 budget request also includes a proposal to fundamentally alter the agency's appropriations programs. Among other changes, it consolidates all of the administrative, salary and benefit costs into one appropriation, it moves trails out of capital improvement, and research is absorbed into land management.

2a. Can you tell us why you as Chief think these changes will improve the Forest Service's ability to get things done and provide Congress and the public with better financial accountability and transparency?

Answer. The proposed budget reform addresses execution problems with the current budget structure, enables the agency to strengthen internal controls and ensure it uses appropriated funds as designated. It infuses transparency within cost types by clearly defining and segregating fixed cost budget line items from other programmatic costs. Included in the proposal is the elimination of cost pools, which significantly increases transparency while at the same time minimizes the associated administrative burden and provides a more direct link between appropriated funds and spending.

The proposed streamlined budget structure would enable the agency to be more responsive to emergent forest health needs, reduce administrative burdens, and improve the agency's ability to prioritize resources strategically. Rather than appropriating funds to budget line items that have been added to the Forest Service budget structure over time on an ad hoc basis, the proposal aligns funding with the land management goals of the agency and will lead to more efficient achievement of the agency's mission.

2b. What lessons learned from the Integrated Resource Restoration proposal, which did not show significant improvements in achieving the agency's mission despite removing budgetary stovepipes, were used to inform this new proposal?

Answer. The IRR pilot highlighted benefits, challenges and best practices that are incorporated into budget reform. Specifically, budget reform adopts a landscape approach to include governance/prioritization, transparency of process improvement, and a continued focus on building a community of practice to facilitate learning during the transition.

2c. Why will this budget structure reform succeed where Integrated Resource Restoration failed?

Answer. The IRR Pilot created an opportunity for increased regional and forest-level collaboration and enhanced strategic planning and prioritization to achieve landscape outcomes in specific pilot regions. The budget reform also adopts a landscape approach that incorporates best practices and lessons learned from IRR. One of the benefits and big changes from IRR of the proposed structure is the clear identification of fixed costs. This allows the agency to better manage fixed costs and enable greater flexibility to capitalize on opportunities to leverage partnerships, streamline NEPA analysis, and study ecological/

weather conditions to maximize returns on landscape management investments. The budget reform approach differs from the IRR Pilot in that it will be implemented agency-wide and will affect the entire agency budget structure.

Question 3. We hear from stakeholders that funding for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects siphons funding away from other potential activities on a given Forest or in a specific Region.

3a. How will you both fulfill the 10-year funding commitments made when the CFLR agreements were signed and tackle additional priorities that would be wrestling over the same scant resources?

Answer. Investing CFLR funds can mean there are fewer funds for work on other landscapes, the focused investment also attracts partner investments, including over \$450 million from 2010 to 2018, and allows more meaningful reduction of forest health risks. The Forest Service also works to align CFLR projects with strategic assessments of forest health risks so the necessary trade-offs align with our broader strategies for improving forest conditions.

Question 4. The Interior Department's fiscal year 2020 budget included a set of legislative proposals providing new categorical exclusions for active forest management across both Interior and Forest Service lands.

4a. How involved were you and your staff in developing those proposals?

Answer. The Forest Service worked with the Department of the Interior on the development of the legislative proposal. A legislative proposal is the beginning of our interaction with Congress to address a particular issue or need. The Forest Service looks forward to engaging with interested members to improve our ability to responsibly accomplish more work on the ground and provide better service on behalf of the American people.

Question 5. Just last year, in the Fire Fix legislation, we gave you new authority for a categorical exclusion for hazardous fuels and wildfire resilience projects, expanded the use of streamlined environmental review for fire and fuel breaks, extended the term of stewardship contracts to 20 years where wildfire is a significant risk, limited opportunities for litigation related to new critical habitat designations, set up a process to address vegetation management with utilities in rights of way, and amended the Good Neighbor Authority to allow the reconstruction of road that are necessary to carry out an agreement.

5a. What specific steps have you taken to implement the new authorities we gave you in 2018?

Answer. The 2018 Omnibus Appropriation Act (2018 Act) amended Section 605 of the 2003 Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) to establish a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for wildfire resilience projects. As of July 18, 2019, eight projects using the HFRA Section 605 CE have a signed decision memo. The NEPA analysis is currently in-progress on 11 projects using the CE. The Forest Service continues to use this CE as well as the CE authorized under HFRA Section 603 for authorized hazardous fuels reduction projects to increase resilience on National Forest System lands.

The Forest Service has executed over 200 Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements in 37 States. Under the 2018 Farm Bill expanded GNA, States have the authority to retain revenue from GNA projects to be used on other projects on national forests. Counties and Tribes can also now enter into GNA agreements. In addition, we have:

- Implemented new guidance and agreement templates to encourage the development of new and expanded GNA agreements.
- Initiated working with counties and Tribes to start new projects.
- Implemented new policies and procedures to allow our cooperators to engage in road maintenance projects under the new authorities starting in 2018.
- Begun reviewing existing GNA agreements across the Nation to identify appropriate places to most successfully apply the expanded GNA.

The 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act expanded the stewardship contracting authority, allowing the Forest Service to develop 20-year stewardship contracts and agreements where wildfire is of significant risk. The Forest Service currently has in place the first 20-year stewardship agreement with the National Wild Turkey Federation while two others are in the process of being finalized. Every Forest Service region is actively evaluating the potential for other 20-year stewardship contracts and agreements, with two others currently

under development. These projects are looking at innovative ways of increasing treatments of high-risk forests and developing new economies.

The 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act also granted a new utilities right of way authority. Under this new authority, in March 2019, the Southwest Region (R5) approved a master operation and maintenance plan (OMP), in conjunction with issuance of a master special use permit, for Pacific Gas and Electric's and Southern California Edison's electric transmission and distribution lines on over 2,300 miles of National Forest System lands in 15 national forests. The OMP was approved under the newly enacted provisions in the 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act governing vegetation management, facility inspection, and operation and maintenance plans for electric transmission and distribution lines.

The Forest Service Washington Office program managers also prepared briefings and summaries regarding the new authorities, which were shared with line officers, regions, and field-level specialists. Field staff are encouraged to use the new authorities where applicable and efficient. Monitoring flags were established in our performance tracking systems to highlight when and where the new authorities are used.

Question 6. Legacy Roads and Trails:

6a. How is the Forest Service continuing to prioritize, track, and meet goals related to its statutory responsibility to protect water quality on National Forest lands and address the impacts on water quality from roads without a dedicated Legacy Roads and Trails budget line item?

Answer. Although this budget line item was merged into the agency's Roads budget line item, the Forest Service has not changed its focus on achieving the outcomes envisioned for the Legacy Roads and Trails program. The agency continues to use and develop methods to prioritize and track our statutory responsibility to protect water quality on the National Forest System lands. That includes tracking road decommissioning, road maintenance activities, and road construction. Beginning in fiscal year 2017, the Forest Service initiated a 5-year strategic approach to accomplish another 1,000 culverts removed or replaced for aquatic organism passage (AOP) and flood resiliency. The agency is on track to exceed that goal by 2021.

6b. What are the fiscal year 2020 targets for the following activities: road removal, culvert removal, road upgrades and culvert upgrades?

Answer. In a shift towards more outcome-based performance metrics, the Forest Service no longer assigns activity-specific targets for its programs, including those specific to drainage improvements. The agency does, however, track key metrics for road improvements and decommissioning on National Forest Service system, and non-system, roads.

6c. What are the actual accomplishments for those four activities for the past 5 years by region?

Answer. See tables below.

USDA FOREST SERVICE, ROAD REMOVAL

Accomplishment Report (miles)
Fiscal Year(s) 2014–2018

Region	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Grand Total
Northern (01)	0	11	240	530	77	781
Rocky Mountain (02)	3	3	38	23	19	67
Southwestern (03)	0	0	21	6	3	27
Intermountain (04)	0	0	18	14	0	32
Pacific Southwest (05)	0	15	6	19	34	40
Pacific Northwest (06)	37	42	1,132	64	1,588	1,275
Southern (08)	0	0	12	45	9	57
Eastern (09)	39	0	39	100	57	178
Alaska (10)	0	0	19	0	0	19
Forest Service Total	79	71	1,524	801	1,786	2,476

USDA FOREST SERVICE, ROAD UPGRADE

Accomplishment Report (miles)
Fiscal Year(s) 2014–2018

Region	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Grand Total
Northern (01)	10	29	3,416	393	6,611	3,849
Rocky Mountain (02)	41	93	2,402	815	519	3,351
Southwestern (03)	123	15,040	4,441	2,244	259	21,848
Intermountain (04)	0	11	85,620	1,014	131	86,645
Pacific Southwest (05)	0	50,662	2,973	1,381	17,005	55,017
Pacific Northwest (06)	9,691	6,292	7,053	1,211	14,730	24,247
Southern (08)	3	2	80	438	252	524
Eastern (09)	133	36	82,116	4,243	723	86,529
Alaska (10)	19	23,485	227	0	0	23,731
Forest Service Total	10,022	95,649	188,329	11,739	40,229	305,739

USDA FOREST SERVICE, CULVERT REMOVAL

Accomplishment Report (Linear Feet)
Fiscal Year(s) 2014–2018

Region	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Grand Total
Northern (01)	0	7	82	16	155	105
Rocky Mountain (02)	7	46	5	26	9	84
Southwestern (03)	0	0	0	1	0	1
Intermountain (04)	0	0	144	21	4	165
Pacific Southwest (05)	0	4	29	10	25	43
Pacific Northwest (06)	135	226	430	103	248	894
Southern (08)	0	0	92	1	0	93
Eastern (09)	0	0	26	7	3	33
Alaska (10)	10	55	300	22	0	387
Forest Service Total	152	338	1,108	207	444	1,805

USDA FOREST SERVICE, CULVERT UPGRADE

Accomplishment Report (Linear Feet)
Fiscal Year(s) 2014–2018

Region	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Grand Total
Northern (01)	7	145	680	193	303	1,025
Rocky Mountain (02)	48	55	218	222	61	543
Southwestern (03)	0	206	172	45	423	423
Intermountain (04)	274	191	4	4,685	697	5,153
Pacific Southwest (05)	0	9	419	261	341	689
Pacific Northwest (06)	540	672	739	523	390	2,474
Southern (08)	0	1	126	35	30	162
Eastern (09)	185	54	328	536	351	1,103
Alaska (10)	335	325	868	48	2	1,576
Forest Service Total	1,389	1,658	3,554	6,548	2,598	13,148

Question 7. Land acquisition, exchanges, and donations are all important tools for reducing the checkerboard ownership that creates management problems and heightens fire risks. They are also an important tool for providing recreational access to places hunters, anglers, and others want to get to in the backcountry. Therefore, there are real costs, both a management cost and a social and economic cost to rural areas, if these programs did not exist. The Forest Legacy program works similarly, but with State and private lands. The States nominate working forest lands that should be conserved so that they can continue being just that, a working forest and an economic driver in the local community.

7a. When determining to zero out all land acquisition programs, did your staff do an analysis of what the costs are for additional fire and watershed management, road maintenance, fencing, and other requirements for private inholdings across the system if these programs did not exist?

Answer. The administration is focused on caring for the lands the Forest Service currently owns. The Forest Service budget seeks to directly address the millions of acres at risk for wildfire by requesting \$450 million for hazardous fuels reduction, and addressing the Forest Service's \$5 billion infrastructure maintenance backlog by retaining a portion of mineral receipts from the proposed Public Lands Infrastructure Fund legislation.

7b. Without Forest Legacy, how do you propose to assist the States in preventing the fragmentation of environmentally significant forests?

Answer. The Working Forest Lands Program (formerly the Forest Stewardship Program) works in partnership with State forestry agencies to connect private landowners with the information and tools they need to actively manage their forests. Actively managed forests provide timber, fuel wood, wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and recreational opportunities; and help create jobs in rural communities by sustaining local markets for forest products.

7c. Isn't this program an important part of a Shared Stewardship vision for our forested lands?

Answer. Promoting well managed forests across all ownerships is an important part of the agency's Shared Stewardship vision. The agency is currently working with States to undertake a comprehensive review and update of their State Forest Action Plans. State Forest Action Plans offer long-term plans for investing State, Federal, and other resources where they can be most effective in achieving national conservation goals.

Question 8. In 2017, Secretary Zinke undertook a review of National Monuments, and coordinated with Secretary Purdue on those monuments under Forest Service jurisdiction. This resulted in a removal of Forest Service lands from the Bears Ears designation, despite reports that USDA did not recommend any Forest Service acreage for removal.

8a. Since the President's Bears Ears proclamation, has the Forest Service engaged with the Office of the Secretary or with the Department of the Interior on additional changes to any monuments?

Answer. No. Since the President's December 2017 Proclamation pertaining to Bears Ears National Monument, the Forest Service has not engaged with the Office of the Secretary or with the Department of the Interior on additional changes to any monuments.

Question 9. The Interior Department implemented a new regional structure last year and is proposing to relocate staff out of the Capital Region and other longtime regional offices, and USDA is proposing to move facilities out of the Capital Region as well.

9a. Has the Forest Service been tasked with or engaged in any similar relocation or reorganization discussions, or any review of its Washington Office, regional structure or office locations?

Answer. The Forest Service has not been tasked with or engaged in any similar relocations or reorganization discussions, or any review of its Washington Office, regional structure or office locations.

9b. If so, what funds in the fiscal year 2020 Budget are associated with that activity?

Answer. The Forest Service does not have any funding in the fiscal year 2020 Budget associated with this activity.

Question 10. The Forest Service is currently reviewing State requests for exceptions to the Roadless Rule. I have heard from Tribal governments that government-to-government consultations have been lacking in the current process. Additionally, the proclamation eliminating portions of the Bears Ears National Monument cited existing protections, such as Inventoried Roadless Areas, as justification for removing those areas from monument status. The State of Utah's request for a State-specific Roadless Rule includes removal of those same Roadless Area protections.

10a. When and how will you engage with Tribal governments before releasing a draft environmental impact statement? Will that engagement include subsistence hearings?

Answer. Only one petition for a State-specific roadless rule is under consideration by the Forest Service. This petition is for the State of Alaska, where subsistence is a central issue. Government-to-government consultation is ongoing with Alaska Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations as part of the rulemaking process. This includes upcoming meetings with Agency and Department officials.

10b. How will you ensure consistency with the administration's support for these Roadless protections as you consider the State of Utah's petition?

Answer. The Forest Service has not initiated rulemaking for a Utah-specific roadless rule.

10c. Given the statistical likelihood of human-caused fires starting near roads, will exceptions to the Roadless Rule increase the risk of wildfire ignitions in those areas, and are those risks being analyzed in the agency's review of the States' requests?

Answer. The issue of human-caused fires starting near roads was raised in the context of the petition for roadless rule for Utah. However, Forest Service has not initiated rulemaking for a Utah-specific roadless rule. The State's petition for rulemaking is currently under review. The State of Utah and the Forest Service are addressing the threat of unwanted fire to communities and watersheds through the Shared Stewardship agreement.

Question 11. Shared Stewardship:

11a. How are you ensuring that Tribes, local communities, collaborative groups and other stakeholders, in addition to States, are involved in the decisions being made through Shared Stewardship agreements?

Answer. At the regional, State and national levels the Forest Service has engaged with Tribes, local communities, collaborative groups and other stakeholders, together with the State, and separately, in the context of Shared Stewardship.

We have engaged with the Rural Voices of Conservation Coalition to study how, and provide guidance to, local collaborative groups engaging in shared stewardship and the decisions that are made in that context. National roundtable discussions have and continue to occur with stakeholders. Forest Service field units continue to engage stakeholders, partners, Tribes, local communities, and others at the level of interest on projects and programs that contribute to achieving the vision of shared stewardship. To date, Shared Stewardship agreements have been between the States and the Forest Service. However, the agency is planning some expected future agreements are (either: being planned or being developed) with other partners as signatories, such as USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service and potentially Tribes/Tribal organizations.

These agreements will use all available tools and authorities to achieve mutually desired results and outcomes. New authorities provide us opportunities to involve others in the "implementation" of Shared Stewardship priorities.

The Forest Service is building a "Guidelines for Implementing the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA)" document that answers questions posed to the Forest Service by States, counties and Tribes as to how the new GNA authorities will be implemented. Along with the Guidelines, plans are in place to hold webinars to discuss the new authorities with our external partners in August.

The Forest Service is actively engaged in full partnership with the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC), a national consortium of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and individuals to implement tribally-relevant authorities in the Forestry title of the 2018 Farm Bill and other legislation. The agency has executed a challenge cost-share agreement with ITC to provide subject-matter expertise on Tribal forest management, as well as to help the Forest Service understand the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act Public Law 93-638 authority, as amended, which is new to the agency. In addition to this close partnership, the Forest Service has also undertaken substantial outreach to inform Indian Country of new authorities and to develop new or amended policy in partnership and consultation with Tribes. On May 15, 2019, the Forest Service hosted a national Farm Bill Listening Session to familiarize Tribes and Forest Service employees with new Farm Bill provisions that impact Tribes and to hear their questions and ideas for implementation. The agency

also consulted with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Bureau of Land Management at interagency coordination meetings and coordinated with the BIA on a national Tribal consultation, related to the Tribal Forest Protection Act (Public Law 115–325). The Forest Service also participated in meetings of large regional and national Tribal organizations, including the National Congress of American Indians, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society, as well as the USDA Secretary's Farm Bill Consultation.

The Forest Service has also coordinated with counties in the development of the Good Neighbor templates and is working on implementation of Good Neighbor Projects with several counties.

11b. How will the administration fulfill its commitment to working more closely with States in the Secretary's Shared Stewardship Initiative and assisting them with their forest action plans without the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, which funds the top national priorities in States' forest action plans?

Answer. The Forest Service has and will continue to supply States with data used to inform State Action Plans, regardless of the status of the Landscape Scale Restoration Program. The agency will also support States through the Working Forest Lands program.

11c. What funding within this Budget that correspond with the desired outcomes of the Shared Stewardship Executive Order?

Answer. Shared Stewardship agreements do not rigidly define funding commitments. Shared Stewardship projects will be funded from diverse programs and appropriate budget line items, including partner funding.

11d. What are the criteria being used to evaluate the performance of Shared Stewardship agreements and how will performance indicators help guide prioritization, implementation, and evaluation?

Answer. The Forest Service tracks performance measures that reflect some key outputs of active management, such as hazardous fuels treatments and post-fire rehabilitation of land. Currently, there are eight Shared Stewardship agreements with: the Western Governors Association; and the States of Idaho, Utah, Washington, Montana, Oregon, Arkansas, and North Carolina. Key outputs will be analyzed at multiple levels within the agency to inform decisions on where to focus efforts and funding.

Question 12. State and Volunteer Fire Assistance are proposed for cuts of 12 and 21 percent respectively.

12a. Can you elaborate on the impacts of those cuts—do you know how many fewer fire engines or equipment our State and local partners will be able to purchase and outfit?

Answer. The administration is focused on caring for the lands the Forest Service currently owns. The Forest Service budget seeks to fully support our Federal firefighting capacity, directly address the millions of acres at risk for wildfire and the Forest Service's \$5 billion infrastructure maintenance backlog. For the National Fire Capacity (previously State Fire Assistance) program, a 12 percent reduction in funding would in States being able to purchase approximately 65 fewer fire engines or 25 bulldozers and transport units. For the Rural Fire Capacity (previously Volunteer Fire Assistance) program, a 21 percent reduction in funding would result in approximately 700 fewer grants being provided to volunteer fire departments.

12b. Won't fewer dollars for States and the volunteer fire departments with which you have mutual aid agreements put all private and public lands, including National Forests, at greater risk?

Answer. Reduced funding for the National and Rural Fire Capacity Programs would impact maintaining fire response capabilities of State and local firefighting resources at the local, State and national levels.

In addition to initial responses, funding from these two programs supports hazardous fuels reduction treatments and fire prevention education. Under the strategy of Shared Stewardship, State forestry agencies and many local departments support hazardous fuels reduction activities such as prescribed fire. These activities reduce risk to communities through treatments on State, local, and Federal lands.

Question 13. Community and urban trees can be considered critical infrastructure for both rural communities and cities and State Foresters utilize the Community and Urban Forestry Program to make communities more livable, healthier, energy efficient and vibrant by funding seed money for the planning, planting, and long-term care of trees.

13a. How does the elimination of funding for this program in the President's budget advance the administration's goals of building infrastructure and assisting States and under-served communities?

Answer. The Forest Service has a number of State and Private Forestry programs that serve forests adjacent to rural communities and cities. Providing technical and financial assistance through our Working Forest Lands (previously Forest Stewardship) program will continue to improve and enhance benefits from privately owned forests to adjacent communities.

In fiscal year 2020, the administration is focused on caring for the lands the Forest Service currently owns, especially supporting forest management and wildland fire risk reduction.

13b. What outreach is the Forest Service doing to States to determine the impact of these proposed funding cuts on implementing State forest conservation plans?

Answer. National Association of State Foresters (NASF) leadership and Forest Service leadership meet quarterly in a forum known as the State and Private Forestry Board to discuss potential Federal funding impacts to States. The Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program National Program Leader and staff communicate quarterly with the Chair of the NASF UCF Committee regarding State delivery of the UCF Program and priorities outlined in each State's forest conservation plans. Forest Service Regional UCF Program Managers communicate at least monthly with State forestry UCF Program Coordinators to gauge funding impact at the local community level and report back to National UCF Director and staff.

Question 14. Workplace Misconduct:

14a. What actions have been taken by Forest Service leadership in response to the February 14, 2019 "Forest Service Initiatives to Address Workplace Misconduct" USDA Office of Inspector General Report?

Answer. The Forest Service has adopted all the recommendations made in the USDA Office of Inspector General's report of Forest Service Initiatives to Address Workplace Misconduct. Some of the initiatives adopted include:

- Require all 9,000 hiring managers to complete "Hiring Matters" training, a training that identifies best management practices for evaluating candidates.
- Require hiring managers to conduct reference checks prior to making all hiring decisions.
- Incorporate a new performance metric on the work environment for all supervisors to assess efforts by current managers and supervisors to create and maintain a safe, respectful, and resilient work environment.

14b. Have all of the recommendations in the report been fully implemented? Please identify any recommendations that have not been fully implemented and the status of implementation. If there are any recommendations or aspects of the recommendations that the agency does not intend to implement, please provide an explanation of why those recommendations will not be implemented.

Answer. All recommendations have been fully implemented.

14c. Are there additional actions the Forest Service is taking to improve the workplace that were not recommended by the Inspector General?

Answer. In addition to the recommendations made by the Inspector General, the Forest Service has implemented the following actions:

Alcohol is often a contributing factor in cases of assault, sexual assault, harassment, and other inappropriate behaviors. For the safety of employees, the agency banned the possession and consumption of alcohol in shared government-furnished quarters. The agency-wide alcohol ban was issued in July of 2019. Violation of this policy may result in the termination of the Housing Assignment Agreement.

In the summer of 2019, Forest Service permanent, temporary, and term employees were invited to participate in a survey designed to assess work satisfac-

tion, perceptions of the work environment, and workplace experiences. Results of the survey will be used as a baseline to track progress toward improving the agency's culture.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

Question 1. The Supervisor's Office and visitor center for the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forest (GMFL) in Vermont and New York occupies leased space in downtown Rutland, Vermont. The location is not on National Forest land, lease costs are high, it is only a short term, and the building is for sale. The US Forest Service has selected the site for a new Supervisor's office that is centrally located on the Forest Service-owned land, fronting on a State highway, with high visibility and good access. The Forest Service has invested in full site assessments and preliminary designs. This site is easily developed with good potential for interpretive trails and is close to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and the Vermont Long Trail. It is my understanding that this project is ready to move quickly to construction. It is a real possibility that without a Supervisor's Office in Federal ownership available within the next few years the General Services Administration (GSA) will require for the Supervisor's office to be moved into federally owned excess space within an older downtown U.S. Post Office building in Rutland. This has been previously proposed by GSA.

1a. Where does the Supervisor's Office rank among capital improvement program and construction priorities for Region 9 of the National Forest system in fiscal year 2019 and fiscal year 2020?

Answer. The Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests Supervisor's Office project was the 10th project listed in the fiscal year 2020 Regional Capital Improvement assessment. Region 9 of the National Forest System requested no project funding in fiscal year 2019 for the Supervisor's Office project.

1b. Does the Forest Service plan to move forward to complete the design and construction on the GMFL Supervisor's Office in fiscal year 2020? If not, why not?

Answer. No. The Forest Service will focus Capital Investment Program funding on critical maintenance rather than increasing the number of agency-owned facilities.

1c. Do you believe that the U.S. Forest Service will be best able to deliver its mission for my Vermont constituents and others operating out of its own facility, on the Forest, with outdoor amenities, or from excess space in a downtown Post Office building?

Answer. The Forest Service will be better suited for the Supervisor's Office to operate out of a different facility than the old Post Office building. The downtown Post Office provides little space or access that will suffice for public engagement for permits, visitor information, etc. In addition, there is insufficient space to support all of the necessary equipment that is being used at the current Supervisor's Office. In the case of the Green Mountain National Forest Supervisor's Office, the Eastern Region recommends that a new leased facility other than the Post Office building would most effectively deliver the agency's mission.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR STEVE DAINES

Question 1. Chief Christiansen, Montana is home to an abundance of outdoor recreation, which contributes to our \$7 billion outdoor economy. Unfortunately, lengthy, burdensome, and overly complicated NEPA policies delay permitting and hurt our small businesses that rely on USFS lands. It is my understanding that the Trump administration and USDA are working to streamline NEPA for special use permits, however, I have heard concerns that in our Montana National Forests we are not seeing the benefit from these policy changes. Instead NEPA policies and regulations have become so burdensome that our winter recreation sites are suffering and therefore unable to provide their guests with the same quality of service.

1a. Can you commit to me to work with our winter recreation businesses in Montana to streamline special use permits on our National Forests so they can continue to provide services to recreationists and contribute to Montana's outdoor economy?

Answer. The Forest Service will gladly work with outdoor recreation businesses in Montana to improve the process for issuing special use authorizations for use and occupancy of national forests in Montana, consistent with our laws, regulations, and policies.

We are working to simplify the permitting process and implementing online permitting for outfitters, guides, and other small businesses. Developed in fiscal year 2018, and piloted in fiscal year 2019, online permitting will enhance customer service from the Forest Service and increase economic benefits to communities.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

Question 1. Florida and Georgia combined suffered about \$2 billion in timber losses as a result of Hurricane Michael. These losses have threatened the survival of some of the biggest timber producers and lumber yards, who happen to be important employers in an economically underdeveloped area of my State. But worse than that, it has devastated families and retirees, who invested in their own small timber plots to support their future goals and dreams. Immediately after the storm, the focus was timber salvage and debris clearing operations. But now, we need to develop medium and long range plans to re-grow the industry, and the economic opportunities it provided to the people living in these communities. And we need to remain vigilant over the enhanced threat of wildfire and insect pest and disease outbreaks. With so much timber lost, it is important for mills in the area, and all the support services that depend on mill activity, to have a long-term annual supply commitment from the nearby Apalachicola National Forest for the next 20 plus years until private landowners impacted by the hurricane can re-establish the area's timber base. I appreciate the work USFS has done to date on this issue.

1a. In order for this hard hit area to move forward, is the Forest Service ready to make a long-term annual supply commitment from the Apalachicola National Forest to reeling Panhandle timber mills and associated industries?

Answer. The Forest Service recognizes the impact Hurricane Michael has had in the panhandle area, including the Apalachicola National Forest (ANF). Some of the most productive areas on the forest were affected. Other areas present harvest location challenges due to damaged roads, high water, and saturated soil conditions. The National Forests of Florida (NFF), is working with the local communities and partners to offer a predictable and sustainable supply of wood products. The NFF will continue to explore opportunities to work with and support local industry. The NFF is committed to maximizing the timber sale volume offered annually within the range allowed by environmental and market factors

1b. If so, how do you plan on implementing such a commitment, and what is the timeframe for implementation?

Answer. The Apalachicola National Forest, working with the State of Florida through the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), offered timber sales beginning in November of 2018. To date, seven timber sales have been offered, and the forest continues to prepare additional timber sales. The forest is currently contracting for facilities and infrastructure repair to recover from Hurricane Michael, more than 300 miles of roads on the ANF that could be used for future timber harvest work.

1c. Are there any specific regulations that can be modified in order to appropriately balance important environmental protections with the economic development needs of the surrounding community?

Answer. The current laws and regulations appropriately balance environmental protections and economic development.

1d. How important are Good Neighbor Authority agreements between the Federal Government and the States to achieving the goals and objectives of the Forest Service?

Answer. It is very important to the agency that the GNA program is successful. Without the States, counties, and Tribes it would be very difficult for the agency to meet its restoration goals to restore healthy forests across the Nation. Not only will the cooperators be able to assist in restoring healthy forests, the agency sees this as an opportunity to increase timber production from the national forests which will in turn benefit the local communities. A good example

is on the Apalachicola National Forest where the partnership between all the local governments will allow for expanded and organized responses to this emergency and others that may come.

1e. Are there additional authorities related to Good Neighbor Agreements that could be modified or expanded to better encourage these useful Federal-State partnerships?

Answer. There are exciting new ways the agency can increase the amount of restoration activity that is being implemented under the new GNA authorities, authorized in the 2018 Omnibus Act and the 2018 Farm Bill. The Forest Service is using the authorities provided, which are adequate for now, but the agency believes it is necessary to consider whether counties and Tribes should have the same authority as States to retain the revenues generated from GNA timber sales and use them on other Good Neighbor projects. These expansions could increase the activities being implemented under GNA.

Question 2. I have heard concerns that the proposed funding level for the State and Private Forestry programs in the disaster supplemental bill that failed last month was inadequate at just \$12 million to support States in their efforts to promote forestry recovery after the impacts of both Hurricane Michael and Florence. The National Association of State Foresters and Florida's State Forester, Jim Karels, believe the true need is closer to \$47 million.

2a. If \$12 million accurately represents the Forest Service's request to Congress, how did you derive that figure?

Answer. Please see the chart below in response to question 2b.

2b. If that figure doesn't represent the Forest Service's request, what is the true need for supplemental funding for the State and Private Forestry programs so we can get it right in the new draft?

Answer. Additional supplemental appropriations for disaster relief were enacted on June 6, 2019 (Public Law 116–20), which provided \$12 million in State and Private Forestry funds for necessary expenses related to Hurricane's Florence and Michael. The Forest Service plans to aid the affected States in the Southern region as follows:

PUBLIC LAW 116–20—SOUTHERN REGION DISASTER
SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING PLAN

Program	Planned Amount
SPF	
Forest Health, Cooperative Lands	\$400,891
Forest Stewardship	\$1,496,659
Community Forestry	\$828,508
Fire Protection Programs	\$9,273,942
Total, SPF	\$12,000,000

SUBCOMMITTEE RECESS

Senator DAINES. And with that, we will conclude this hearing.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 10:54 a.m., Wednesday, May 15, the subcommittee was recessed, to reconvene subject to the call of the Chair.]