

**A REVIEW OF TITLE VIII: FORESTRY
STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTRY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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A REVIEW OF TITLE VIII: FORESTRY STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTRY,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m., in Room 1300 of the Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Doug LaMalfa [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Members present: LaMalfa, Kelly, Moore, Chavez-DeRemer, Thompson (*ex officio*), Salinas, Perez, and Vasquez.

Staff present: Adele Borne, John Busovsky, Patricia Straughn, Erin Wilson, John Konya, Paul Babbitt, Kate Fink, and Dana Sandman.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DOUG LAMALFA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM CALIFORNIA

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee will come to order. Welcome, and thank you all for joining today's hearing, which is entitled, *A Review of Title VIII: Forestry Stakeholder Perspectives*. After brief opening remarks, Members will receive testimony from our witnesses today, and then the hearing will be open to questions.

First, I would like to recognize our Chairman of our whole Committee, Mr. G.T. Thompson, for any opening statement that he may have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. THOMPSON. Well, thank you, Chairman LaMalfa and Ranking Member Salinas. I appreciate today's hearing and the opportunity to hear from this great panel of witnesses. Today's hearing marks the first event of the newly formed Forestry Subcommittee. With the great challenges we have in the National Forest System and forested regions of the country, it is my hope that this Subcommittee can shine a brighter spotlight on the needs of the forest sector, especially as we begin the farm bill process.

Since joining the House Committee on Agriculture two farm bills ago, I have been proud of this Subcommittee and the full Committee's forestry achievements, specifically in supporting the Forest Service's non-Federal forest managers, partnership agreements, forest research, and new markets for forest products. Still, forested regions have many significant challenges that need to be addressed.

For decades, we have witnessed timber harvest decline on National Forest lands, which undermines forest health, rural jobs, and the local economy and revenue to counties and local public schools. We are also facing a nationwide forest health crisis and a wildfire crisis in the West. In my district, we continue to have great challenges with invasive insects and plants, and diseases that further undermine forest health. In the West, not only are they dealing with serious forest health issues like invasives, but wildfires remain the number one issue, devastating communities and destroying homes, property, and millions of acres of forest land.

I appreciate—although it was a very solemn experience, just a matter of—within the past month of being in Paradise, California, with our Chairman, a community that he represents that was devastated just a couple of years ago with the loss of 95 lives. And so just an outcome, the most extreme outcome of poor forest health and a lack of robust forest management practices.

By ramping up forest management, there are very real challenges that we can and must aggressively confront. Three weeks ago, this Committee held a farm bill listening session in Tulare, California, and I was a part of that and was proud to join the Chairman in his district and meet with the regional Forest Service, as well as the local forestry and forest products industry.

That opportunity, that visit, the visit to Paradise was an eye-opening experience to see that firsthand and a reminder of what can happen when we don't do enough to manage our most at-risk forest lands. Unfortunately, this is just one fire, and we have seen some of the most difficult fire seasons in recent years. We must get more aggressive with how we treat landscapes, leverage partnerships, and actively reduce the threat of wildfire. And I am hopeful that, as we undertake the writing of the next farm bill, that we can build on the gains that we made in 2014, 2018 laws and consider new ways to help the Forest Service better manage, increase partnerships, and do the restoration work that is badly needed on the tens of millions of acres identified by the agency.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and hearing what recommendations that you have for the upcoming farm bill.

I would also like to personally extend a special welcome to Director Shultzabarger for being here today from Pennsylvania.

And with that, I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thompson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. GLENN THOMPSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa and Ranking Member Salinas. I appreciate today's hearing and the opportunity to hear from this great panel of witnesses.

Today's hearing marks the first event of the newly formed Forestry Subcommittee. With the great challenges we have in the National Forest System and forested regions of the country, it's my hope this Subcommittee can shine a brighter spotlight on the needs of the forest sector, especially as we begin the farm bill process.

Since joining the House Committee on Agriculture two farm bills ago, I have been proud of this Subcommittee and the full Committee's forestry achievements, specifically in supporting the Forest Service, non-Federal forest managers, partnership agreements, forest research, and new markets for forest products.

Still, forested regions have many significant challenges that need to be addressed. For decades, we have witnessed timber harvest decline on National Forest lands which undermines forest health, rural jobs and the local economy, and revenue to counties and local public schools.

We are also facing a nationwide forest health crisis and a wildfire crisis in the West.

In my district, we continue to have great challenges with invasive insects and plants, and diseases that further undermine forest health.

In the West, not only are they dealing with serious forest health issues like invasives, but wildfires remain the number one issue, devastating communities and destroying homes, property, and millions of acres of forest land.

By ramping up forest management, these are very real challenges that we can—and must—aggressively confront.

Three weeks ago, this Committee held a farm bill listening session in Tulare, California. During this trip, I was proud to join Chairman LaMalfa in his district to meet with the regional Forest Service, as well as the local forestry and forest products industry.

We also toured Paradise, California—which is where the Camp Fire took place in 2018. This devastating wildfire is the most destructive California wildfire on record, it burned the entire town, and took the lives of 85 civilians.

It was an eye-opening experience to see that firsthand and a reminder of what can happen when we don't do enough to manage our most at-risk forestlands.

Unfortunately, this is just one fire; and we've seen some of the most difficult fire seasons in recent years. We must get more aggressive with how we treat landscapes, leverage partnerships, and actively reduce the threat of wildfire.

I am hopeful that as we undertake the writing of the next farm bill that we can build on the gains we have made in the 2014 and 2018 laws and consider new ways to help the Forest Service better manage, increase partnerships, and do the restoration work that is badly needed on the tens of millions of acres identified by the agency.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and hearing what recommendations you have for the upcoming farm bill. I'd also like to extend a special welcome to Director Shultzabarger for being here today from Pennsylvania.

With that, I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member and yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Chairman Thompson. And it has certainly been a pleasure to be able to first be given the responsibility of chairing this Subcommittee and to work with you all these years, including this new session as we try and get a fast start, and indeed we are on the farm bill and the issues with our forests in this country. So thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Now, I would like to also recognize our distinguished Ranking Member, the gentlelady from Oregon, Ms. Salinas, for her opening remarks.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ANDREA SALINAS, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM OREGON**

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And good morning. I am very pleased to join this Subcommittee and thank my colleagues on this Subcommittee. I thank the Chairman, Mr. LaMalfa, and I am very honored to be serving as the Ranking Member, and I look forward to working with the gentleman from California.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. I know it takes a good amount of work to pull together testimony, and I appreciate all of you sharing your perspectives and really providing some insight as we move forward on the 2023 Farm Bill.

Healthy forests are critical to our nation, both environmentally, ecologically, and economically. And my home State of Oregon, as you all know, shows how interconnected and intertwined these issues are. Farm bill programs and authorities play an important role in both private forestry and management of our National For-

est System lands. And today's hearing is an important first step and an important first opportunity to hear from our stakeholders on how those current authorities and programs are actually used and implemented by land managers and forest product users to responsibly build rural prosperity and improve forest health. And I look forward to hearing today from the witnesses on those opportunities for improvement and challenges with current implementation efforts.

And I want to again thank Chairman LaMalfa for arranging this hearing, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Salinas. I look forward to our work together as with our neighboring states have faced extreme challenges with forestry and wildfire, *et cetera*, so we will find a lot of common ground on that, I am sure.

So, for my statement, I just want to say thank you again for being here and for this very first committee of the new Congress, for the Subcommittee on Forestry. We will focus on Title VIII of the 2018 Farm Bill, and we will receive testimony from our panel of industry partners for their feedback. We hope to hear what is working, what isn't, and what recommendations our panel has for improvements for the next farm bill due this fall.

Across the West, of course, we continue to face a wildfire forest health crisis. As we begin turning our attention to the next farm bill and discussions on this title, this Committee and Congress as a whole need to understand that this is a true crisis. The pace and scale of active management on these forests and landscapes must be drastically increased, and this must happen right now. We must undertake the paradigm shift that the U.S. Forest Service has been calling for and dramatically increase the management to restore forest health, protect rural residents, air quality, water quality, and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire.

As you know, our Agriculture Committee oversees USDA. The U.S. Forest Service is a component within the USDA, therefore, within our purview. Forest Service has approximately 193 million acres in its charge, and so that is the nexus that we have here today in this Committee and in our obligations as the Agriculture Committee.

In the past 5 years alone, we have seen some of the most destructive wildfires on record, especially in California in my own district. We have seen several of these fires, the 2018 Camp Fire, as our Chairman mentioned, in Paradise and surrounding areas on the ridge in northeast Butte County; the 2020 North Complex Fire, which was several fires in eastern Butte County and stretching into others; the million-acre—say this to yourself for a minute—the million-acre Dixie Fire in 2021 devastated most of Greenville and another town known as Canyon Dam, and touched and threatened many others. And these are just a handful of the many fires. You can't name them all.

Since 2000, we have averaged more than 70,000 wildfires per year and an average of 7 million acres burned annually. This acreage is more than double the average number during the 1990s. Since 2018, we have had four fire seasons that have exceeded 7 million acres, including 2020 when 10.1 million acres burned. We don't really even have a fire season anymore, as such as it is a

year-round fire year. And this has effects not just in the West. We saw during the Dixie Fire that the smoke plume was so massive that it lifted and went across the entire country and affected air quality on East Coast cities where there was advisories for people not to go out and engage in athletic activity.

So what does this mean? The Forest Service must get more aggressive in its pace and scale of forest land treatment and must increase the partnerships with whether it is the private-sector, local government, local Tribes, and other third parties that can cut, harvest, thin more trees that would otherwise only contribute to declining forest health in our overpopulated forests and, of course, the threat of the outbreak of new wildfires. As told to me by members fighting those fires, especially in 2021 and during the million-acre Dixie Fire, those firefighters on the ground have never seen the conditions like they have with the acute level of dryness. The dryness factor was such that it was overwhelming what they had to deal with.

Over the past 30 years, we have fallen way behind with our forest health and management goals, as well as timber harvest needed to promote that health. We only harvest about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the timber we did at the peak on Forest Service lands and routinely fall short of our allowable sale quality across the National Forest System. Indeed, the number of board-feet growing in the forest each year massively outstrips the amount that is been harvested, falling farther and farther behind on inventory.

The Forest Service is carrying out its proposed 10 year strategy to confront the wildfire crisis. Through this plan, the Forest Service has identified some 20 million acres of Federal land and another 30 million acres of adjacent non-Federal lands that are at the highest threat of catastrophic wildfire and in need of immediate treatments. This would be carried out over a 10 year period. Billions of dollars have been appropriated by Congress to the Forest Service over the past year and a half to help support this work, yet funding alone will not fix the massive problems we have with wildfire and our forests. As the agency is moving forward with this work, this Committee needs to know what tools, what authorities or other resources the agency needs, and they must be vocal about it. And all the other partners must help to ensure that this work actually gets done as well.

The farm bill should be used to help address some of these challenges in the West and across the National Forest System. The forestry title of the farm bill contains a variety of provisions, and we must expand the management authorities in this law. For example, the 2018 Farm Bill contained a renewal of the insect and disease categorical exclusion, expanded it to include hazardous fuels reduction. This is a commonsense change as disease and invasive species contribute to worsening forest health.

Federal lands are not good neighbors because they are overstocked and overgrown, allowing our forests to become tinderboxes, ready to ignite onto adjacent private lands. We must expand the Good Neighbor Authority to encourage more partnerships with states, counties, and Tribes who have the ability to efficiently get projects done on the ground that will prevent wildfire and be more timely.

More also needs to be done to help discourage litigation that only serves to undermine commonsense management projects that will help prevent wildfire. This includes legislating a full *Cottonwood* fix, a court decision which has held up or delayed forest restoration projects since 2015. The last farm bill also expanded the Landscape Scale Restoration Program on cross-boundary restoration and authorized new tools that allow for the collaborative treatment of hazardous fuel loads on bordering non-Federal lands. We need more of these authorities and partnerships that allow the Forest Service to administer these treatments immediately, which is needed on these at-risk acres to increase the pace and scale.

The megafires you continue to see are not normal wildfires. We don't have to accept this as a new normal. Because they are landscape-scale wildfires, the proactive treatments must also be landscape scale to prevent them from breaking out in the first place.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here this morning and in person. I know it is not easy to come to Washington, D.C., with travel and taxi and hotels all being expensive and a pain of the rear getting sometimes, I will tell you, so we appreciate your valuable time and willingness to participate with us. We look forward to hearing your testimonies and sharing your expertise and recommendations with this Committee as we wrap up this farm bill process.

[The prepared statement of Mr. LaMalfa follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DOUG LAMALFA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM CALIFORNIA

Good morning. Thank you all for being here and joining us for the very first hearing of the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Forestry.

Today's hearing will focus on Title VIII of the 2018 Farm Bill and we will receive testimony from our panel of industry partners for their feedback. We hope to hear what is working, what isn't, and what recommendations our panel has for improvements for the next farm bill.

Across the West, we continue to face a wildfire and forest health crisis. As we begin turning our attention to the next farm bill and discussions on this title, this Committee and Congress as a whole need to understand that this is a true crisis.

The pace and scale of active management on these forests and landscapes must be drastically increased, and this must happen right now. We must undertake the paradigm shift that the Forest Service has been calling for and dramatically increase management to restore forest health, protect rural residents, and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire.

In the past 5 years alone, we've seen some of the most destructive wildfires on record, especially in California. In my district, we have seen catastrophic damage from the 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, the 2020 North Complex Fire, the million-acre Dixie Fire in 2021, and many others.

Since 2000, we have averaged more than 70,000 wildfires per year and an average of 7 million acres burned annually. This acreage is more than double the average number during the 1990s. Since 2018, we've had four fire seasons that have exceeded 7 million acres, including 2020 when 10.1 million acres burned. We really don't even have a fire season anymore, as much as a fire year.

The Forest Service must get more aggressive, increase partnerships with local governments and third parties, and cut more trees that will otherwise only contribute to declining forest health and the outbreak of new wildfires.

Over the past 30 years, we have fallen way behind with our forest health and management goals, as well as timber harvest needed to promote health. We only harvest about 1/3 of the timber we did at one time on Forest Service lands and routinely fall short of our allowable sale quantity across the National Forest System.

The Forest Service is carrying out its proposed 10 year strategy to confront the wildfire crisis. Through this plan, the Forest Service has identified some 20 million acres of Federal land, and another 30 million acres of adjacent non-Federal lands, that are at the highest threat of catastrophic wildfire and in need of immediate

treatment. Billions of dollars have been appropriated by Congress to the Forest Service over the past year and a half to help support this work, yet funding alone won't fix the massive problems we have with wildfire and our forests.

As the agency is moving forward with this work, this Committee needs to know what tools, authorities, or other resources the agency and all of our partners must have to ensure that this work actually gets done. The farm bill should be used to help address some of these challenges in the West and across the National Forest System.

The forestry title of the farm bill contains a variety of provisions, and we must expand the management authorities in this law. For example, the 2018 Farm Bill contained a renewal of the insect and disease categorical exclusion and expanded it to include hazardous fuels reduction.

This is a commonsense change, as disease and invasive species contribute to worsening forest health. Federal lands are not good neighbors because they are overstocked and overgrown, allowing our forests to become tinderboxes ready to ignite. We must expand Good Neighbor Authority to encourage more partnerships with states, counties, and Tribes who have the ability to efficiently get projects on the ground that will prevent wildfire.

More also needs to be done to help discourage litigation that only serves to undermine commonsense management projects that will help prevent wildfire. This includes legislating a full *Cottonwood* fix, a court decision which has held up or delayed forest restoration projects since 2015.

The last farm bill also expanded the Landscape Scale Restoration program on cross-boundary restoration; and authorized new tools that allow for the collaborative treatment of hazardous fuel loads on bordering non-Federal lands. We need more of these authorities and partnerships that allow the Forest Service to administer the treatments immediately needed on at-risk acres.

The megafires we continue to see are not normal wildfires. Because they are landscape-scale wildfires, the proactive treatments must also be landscape-scale to prevent them from breaking out in the first place.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for being here this morning and in person. I know it isn't easy to come to Washington, D.C., so we appreciate your valuable time and willingness to participate. We look forward to hearing your testimonies and sharing your expertise and recommendations with this Committee as we ramp up this farm bill process.

The CHAIRMAN. So seeing who we have here today, we will move on to our witnesses. The chair would request that any other Members that would wish to submit their opening statements for the record so that we can have these—I can't talk. So the witnesses may begin their testimony to ensure that there is ample time for questions.

So our first witness today is Ms. Ellen Shultzabarger, who is the State Forester for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. How did you manage that, Mr. Chairman? She is testifying today on behalf of the National Association of State Foresters.

Okay. Then our next witness will be Mr. Skip Brandt, who is the First District, Idaho County Commissioner. He is testifying today on behalf of the National Association of Counties.

Our third witness is Mr. Bill Imbergamo, the Executive Director of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition.

And our fourth and final witness is Mr. Patrick Holmes, who is the Vice President of Urban Policy at American Forests.

So thank you all for joining. Let's proceed with your testimony. And each of you will have 5 minutes. The timer in front of you will count down to 0, at which point your time has expired.

So Ms. Shultzabarger, please begin when you are ready.

**STATEMENT OF ELLEN SHULTZABARGER, STATE FORESTER
AND DIRECTOR, PENNSYLVANIA BUREAU OF FORESTRY,
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES;
TREASURER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE
FORESTERS, HARRISBURG, PA**

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Good morning, all, and thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee, for holding this hearing today and allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Association of State Foresters.

I am Ellen Shultzabarger, and I am the Pennsylvania State Forester, and I also serve as Treasurer for the NASF.

NASF represents the directors of the forestry agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, five U.S. Territories, and the three nations in compacts of free association in the U.S. State Foresters manage and protect state and private forests, which encompass nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of our forests nationwide. State forestry agencies are the primary delivery system for forest management activities, which include delivering technical and financial assistance to private landowners, protecting forest health and water resources, promoting the stewardship of all forests, including those in rural community and urban areas, and performing wildfire prevention and suppression across the country.

This morning, I would like to highlight a few policy priorities NASF has identified for the next farm bill. First, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Pub. L. 117-58) provides flexible funding for the State Forest Action Plan implementation, allowing states to address the highest forest management priorities. NASF supports creating an authorization of appropriation in the 2023 Farm Bill to ensure this flexible funding is secured into the future to enable states to effectively target State Forest Action Plan priority needs.

Second, the 2018 Farm Bill expanded the Good Neighbor Authority to allow Tribes and counties to enter into Good Neighbor agreements. However, they were not afforded the authority to retain GNA revenues that would be reinvested back into those landscapes, greatly reducing the incentive to engage and partner on critical landscape projects.

Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill removed the ability for forest restoration services to take place off Federal lands under established Good Neighbor agreements. This means that adjacent state, Tribal, county, or other lands that are essential to the health and productivity of the National Forests can no longer be restored as a comprehensive landscape with the revenues generated from GNA projects. NASF supports authorizing counties and Tribes to retain and reinvest GNA project revenues, while also supporting the removal of the requirement that revenue must be spent solely on Federal lands.

Third, the 2018 Farm Bill codified the Landscape Scale Restoration Program but also stipulated a new rural requirement for LSR, resulting in a subsequent rulemaking by the Forest Service limiting LSR work to communities of less than 50,000 people. This change has significantly reduced the scope and efficacy of the program, eliminating many opportunities to work in critical communities to address large-scale issues such as wildfire risk reduction,

watershed protection and restoration, and the spread of invasive plant, insects, and diseases. For example, many of these ineligible communities are found within high wildland-urban interface areas and are impacted by the spread of invasive pests or diseases. NASF supports modifying the language of the 2018 Farm Bill that designated LSR strictly as *rural* to allow for the program to address all identified critical forestry issues nationwide.

Fourth, NASF supports an all-lands approach to reforestation by creating an authorization for appropriations in the farm bill to elevate and support the Forest Service Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources Program, or RNGR, which supports Federal, state, Tribal, and private nurseries and seed orchards. This funding authorization would expand staffing to provide more technical assistance and training, to create opportunities for nurseries to upgrade old infrastructure, to promote practices to increase seedling production and also seed quality, and will better allow the Forest Service to serve as a convener for the increasing nationwide nursery tree improvement and tree planting efforts and great needs.

We appreciate the Subcommittee holding this important hearing today to review the forestry provisions from the 2018 Farm Bill and to work toward developing the next farm bill. I would also like to thank you, Chairman Thompson, for your longstanding support and leadership in forestry issues and opportunities across the U.S. and in Pennsylvania, and thank you for establishing this Subcommittee. Thank you so much for the time and your consideration of NASF recommendations.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shultzabarger follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELLEN SHULTZABARGER, STATE FORESTER AND DIRECTOR, PENNSYLVANIA BUREAU OF FORESTRY, DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION & NATURAL RESOURCES; TREASURER, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS, HARRISBURG, PA

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is pleased to provide written testimony to the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry for this important hearing on “*A Review of Title VIII: Forestry Stakeholder Perspectives*.” Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of NASF.

NASF represents the directors of the forestry agencies in all 50 states, five U.S. Territories, three nations in compacts of free association with the U.S., and the District of Columbia. State foresters deliver technical and financial assistance to private landowners for the conservation of more than 2/3 of the nation’s forests. They also partner with Federal land management agencies through cooperative agreements and Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to manage National Forests and grasslands. All state forestry agencies share a common mission to protect America’s forests and most have statutory responsibilities to provide wildland fire protection on all lands, public and private.

State foresters recognize the farm bill as a unique opportunity to support rural America’s economic backbone and improve the quality of life for all Americans by enhancing support for America’s trees and forests.

Between the 2018 Farm Bill and the 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, several significant achievements were accomplished, providing new authorities for improving forest management. The 2018 Farm Bill forestry title built upon 2014 achievements, streamlining decision-making, expanding authorities within several programs and creating several new programs and authorities while continuing to address and provide for cross-boundary and landscape-scale forest management.

Recent farm bills have also been instrumental in elevating the role of forestry in conservation title programs. State forestry agencies are proactively involved in working with our Federal counterparts to successfully implement these programs, providing invaluable support to small private landowners in their forest management needs. NASF appreciates the ongoing program support and attention in the

farm bill that translates to tangible, on-the-ground progress through these collective efforts.

State Foresters have established the following principles to guide the development of the next generation of forestry and conservation programs through the 2023 Farm Bill:

Codify State Forest Action Plan Implementation Funding

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA/BIL) bill provides funding for State Forest Action Plan (SFAP) implementation. This is not a provision of IIJA/BIL but is part of the funding to the states and territories from the “unspecified” Division J funds, also referred to as “state action plan funds.” This funding is \$40 million per year. After reductions for administrative activities for Business Ops, OIG, SPF S&E, there’s about \$31M to support states/Territories annually for 5 years. These funds come to the Regions as SFAP (Budget Code) and are activated through specific programs: Forest Stewardship, Rural Forestry Assistance, Urban and Community Forestry, Cooperative Forest Health, and Cooperative Fire.

NASF supports codifying this State Forest Action Plan Implementation authority which allows states to implement the highest priority forest management activities within their state, as identified and developed collaboratively with partners and stakeholders. Allocations to states would be formula-based and not competitive, supporting out-year planning and budgeting for match purposes. NASF supports an authorization of appropriation for \$40M to be formulated to the USDA Forest Service’s (Forest Service) new budget structure.

Good Neighbor Authority

The Good Neighbor Authority program has allowed the Forest Service to partner with states on Federal forest restoration and management projects, facilitating critical work to improve species habitat, enhance watersheds, reduce hazardous fuels and mitigate wildfire risks.

Since GNA was first authorized by Congress with the 2014 Farm Bill, at least 38 states have broken ground on over 380 GNA projects. Through these GNA projects, states are contributing to the restoration of Federal forests on an unprecedented scale. According to the Congressional Research Service, the amount of Forest Service timber sold under GNAs has increased from 14.4 million board feet in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 to 182.6 million board feet in FY 2019.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress expanded GNA to make Tribes and Counties eligible entities to enter into Good Neighbor Agreements. However, Tribes and Counties were not afforded the same authority as states to retain GNA project revenues to reinvest in conservation, greatly reducing a significant incentive to engage and partner on critical management projects including wildfire mitigation, invasive species management, and habitat maintenance.

Further, the 2018 Farm Bill removed the ability to carry out restoration services that were agreed to under the Good Neighbor Agreement to take place off Federal lands. As a result, adjacent state, Tribal, county, and other land that is essential to the health and productivity of National Forests can no longer be restored as a comprehensive landscape with revenues generated from GNA projects.

NASF supports authorizing counties and Federally Recognized Tribes to retain and expend GNA timber sale revenues and restoring the cross-boundary nature of GNA by removing the requirement that GNA timber sale revenues must be spent solely on Federal lands.

Additionally, NASF supports further expanding GNA to all Federal land management agencies, making the authority permanent, or at a minimum extending the October 1, 2023, sunset date for states to retain GNA timber sale revenue, and amending GNA to authorize the reconstruction, repair, and restoration of roads administered by the Bureau of Land Management and other Federal agencies (should GNA be expanded to include other Federal land management agencies).

Landscape Scale Restoration Program

The 2018 Farm Bill codified the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program which was a key policy priority for NASF. The program originated with the 2008 Farm Bill and existed for a decade as a jointly administered program between the Forest Service and state forestry agencies.

In addition to codifying the program, the 2018 Farm Bill also stipulated a new “rural” requirement for LSR. Consequently, and per a subsequent rulemaking made by the Forest Service, LSR work can only be conducted in communities made up of fewer than 50,000 people. This change significantly reduced the scope and efficacy of the program by prohibiting work in areas across the United States with legitimate need for LSR grant support.

The LSR rural requirement has eliminated opportunities for state forestry agencies to leverage their Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program work, and greatly restricted their ability to conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects under LSR in areas with populations greater than 50,000, including many areas within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

LSR should be returned to a flexible program able to address the highest priority needs across landscapes as identified in state Forest Action Plans, regardless of community size. The program should not exclude larger communities or populations that depend on trees for their health and wellbeing, particularly in historically marginalized communities.

Forests aren't just found on mountainsides or in wildlands, but in cities, towns and a vast array of communities. Community forests—especially in areas with over 50,000 residents—are shown to significantly improve human health outcomes and provide tremendous socioeconomic benefits. Healthy community forests aren't a given; they take work. For decades, state forestry agencies have helped communities manage their forests by providing technical and financial assistance for the planting and care of street, park, and other community trees. State forestry agencies and their U&CF programs are crucial to ensuring all people have equitable access to the many benefits of trees.

The LSR program has supported many successful U&CF projects in priority areas with competitive grant funding in the past. It is crucial that LSR projects can once again include U&CF work.

NASF supports striking the rural requirement from LSR legislative language established in the 2018 Farm Bill. To be as impactful as possible across ownerships and on a landscape scale, all lands—including cities, suburbs, and towns—should be eligible for LSR support as they were prior to the 2018 Farm Bill.

Support an “All-Lands” Approach to Reforestation by Creating a Stand-Alone Budget Line Item (BLI) for the USFS Reforestation, Nurseries and Genetic Resources Program (RNGR)

The Forest Service is the Federal agency responsible for helping states to produce, distribute, and plant seedlings on private land. In 2001, the agency created the National Reforestation, Nursery, and Genetics Resources (RNGR) Program within State and Private Forestry. In 2004, an agreement with the National Forest System and Research and Development expanded RNGR to better coordinate activities and outreach, use expertise more effectively, and provide program continuity.

Technical specialists assigned to RNGR are located across the country. RNGR's first priority is direct technical assistance to Federal, Tribal, state, territorial, and private nurseries. The Forest Service National Seed Laboratory (NSL) is a key component of the RNGR Program, particularly important in addressing emerging germplasm conservation needs.

The RNGR Program provides assistance in native plant seed and seedling production where other sources of technical assistance are unavailable. RNGR activities focus on:

- Adequate supplies of reasonably priced, high quality, genetically well-adapted seedlings for conservation and reforestation;
- Propagation and planting methods that improve seedling survival and growth; and
- Cost-effective production and planting techniques.

In the last few years, a significant amount of legislative, agency, NGO community and general public interest has been directed towards tree planting to address climate change and forest resilience, land reclamation, land rehabilitation after extreme fire events and the overall improvement of urban environments.

Recognizing that this increased interest is likely to increase seedling demand, NASF conducted our second study of state forestry tree seedling nursery and tree improvement programs in 2021. The first study, completed in 2015 and published in 2016, aimed to provide a comprehensive look at state efforts in terms of quantities, species, program needs and other issues. The second study focused more on challenges, barriers and opportunities related to expanded production.

The same year that second study was conducted, the journal *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change* published an article by multiple authors titled “Challenges to the Reforestation Pipeline in the United States.”

In the spring of 2022, the USDA Under Secretary's Office held a symposium to bring together a variety of experts from the state, Federal, private and NGO sectors to similarly identify challenges, barriers and opportunities involved in greatly accelerating tree planting across all lands, but with a particular focus on Federal lands.

Results from these three separate efforts yield similar conclusions:

- An adequate work force, in terms of both skilled and general labor, is lacking;
- Substantially more funding needs to go into the infrastructure necessary to expand seed and seedling capacity; and
- Information sharing to improve technical knowledge and practices, and to better understand demands, climate change impacts and other issues is necessary.

The RNGR program is uniquely positioned to address these needs, but is sorely underfunded.

NASF supports a new authorization for appropriations, creating a new BLI for RNGR and significantly increasing funding for the program with new dollars—*i.e.*, not using funds redirected from other State and Private Forestry Programs. Funding would expand staffing to provide more technical assistance and training to address skilled staff shortages, create opportunities for nurseries to apply for infrastructure improvement/expansion grants, promote practices that reduce general labor needs without sacrificing quantities or qualities of seedlings and serve as a convenor of nursery/tree improvement/tree planting interests nationwide.

NASF supports amending the Reforestation Trust Fund (16 U.S.C. 1606(a)) to provide financial support to the Reforestation Nurseries and Genetic Resources (RNGR) program; to support Federal, state, Tribal, and private operated tree nurseries and seed orchards.

Enhance the Conservation Reserve Program

When the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was created in the late 1980s, tree planting was envisioned as a prime way to address concerns over highly erodible agricultural soils. However, CRP did not envision how to support and incentivize beneficial forest health and conservation decisions by landowners as their trees under CRP reached maturity. In some parts of the country, CRP planted stands are over 30 years old and reaching maturity, having been re-enrolled twice over. The landowners of such stands are at a critical decision point in their management; however, they are not allowed to harvest their trees while under a CRP contract. This is viewed by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) as tantamount to “destroying the conservation cover,” thus rendering the landowner ineligible for further participation in CRP. Moreover, if the landowner finishes a contract and then harvests their trees, their land is deemed by FSA to not meet the definition of “eligible cropland” and thus cannot be planted with trees again under CRP without significant investment to return the land to a plantable condition.

CRP authorization needs to be amended to support forest landowners throughout the life of their stand, especially when a CRP-enrolled stand reaches maturity. CRP should allow for the landowner to re-enroll their acreage, as it still provides the same soil-retention and conservation benefits as when they first enrolled in CRP. At the very least, CRP policy should be amended to incentivize landowners with stands at maturity to replant in one of many conservation priority ecosystems across the country (ex—longleaf pine, bottomland hardwood, white oak, *etc.*). Without retaining CRP eligibility post-harvest, forest landowners could be incentivized to revert to agricultural production with society losing the soil-retention and conservation benefits forests provide.

NASF further supports removing the one-re-enrollment limitation for hardwood stands in CRP. There should be no limitation on re-enrollment of forested acreage within CRP, hardwood or otherwise, as long as it continues to provide the resource benefits desired of CRP-enrolled lands. This is particularly true for stands that have undergone mid-contract management to ensure they are healthy and at the proper stand density. This is important not only for hardwood forests across the nation, but also for supporting the expansion of longleaf pine acreage in the south, as FSA considers longleaf pine a hardwood for the purposes of this program and limits longleaf pine to a single re-enrollment.

Finally, CRP offers an annual payment to landowners who take highly erodible lands out of agricultural production. Various land cover types, including trees, are eligible for the program. The 2018 Farm Bill increased the overall cap on program acres, but hardwood tree planting projects are ineligible for “Continuous Sign-up.” This means they are not automatically enrolled and must compete against other projects in the “General Sign-up” process. The ranking criteria for “General Sign-up” include air quality improvement, but do not mention carbon sequestration explicitly. A continued increase in the acreage cap, relaxing the maximum on rental payments, and placing greater priority on tree planting would result in increased carbon storage.

Bolster Post-Disaster Forest Landowner Assistance and the Emergency Forest Restoration Program

Since the 2018 Farm Bill was passed, forest landowners across the country have been impacted by a myriad of natural disasters. In the wake of hurricanes in the South, the 2020 Derecho in Iowa, catastrophic wildfires in the West, and tornados, ice storms and more everywhere in between, we have realized the significant Federal programming gap that exists in helping landowners reforest and get back on their feet. The Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) which was codified in the 2008 Farm Bill (Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008) has proven to be woefully inadequate and too bureaucratically cumbersome for most landowners to benefit from. Forest landowners should have equal support from the Federal Government compared to other agriculture commodities when faced with the impacts of natural disaster. Timely and ecologically proper timber salvage and reforestation helps ensure our nation's private forestlands continue to provide public benefits like clean air and water, recreational opportunities, rural economic stimulus and more.

NASF supports fair post-disaster tax treatment for forest landowners through the inclusion of the Disaster Reforestation Act in the 2023 Farm Bill.

Promoting Cross-Boundary Wildfire Mitigation

The 2018 Farm Bill amended section 103 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (16 U.S.C. § 6513), providing a new authority for the Forest Service to spend up to \$20 million on grants to state foresters for hazardous fuel reduction projects that cross land ownership boundaries, particularly in priority landscapes as identified in state FAPs.

While section 8401 of the 2018 Farm Bill, *Promoting Cross Boundary Wildfire Mitigation*, is working well, there remains a need to increase the authorization of appropriation for this provision. Additionally, it is our understanding the Forest Service used this new authority to codify an existing mechanism for implementing cross-boundary hazardous fuels projects, commonly known as 'Stevens Money.'

The intent from the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition for section 8401 of the 2018 Farm Bill was to supplement existing mechanisms for implementing cross-boundary hazardous fuels projects and augment funding available to accomplish this work, not to codify 'Stevens Money.' We look forward to working with Members of the Subcommittee and our partners in the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition to develop a solution that will best utilize all available authorities and funding to accomplish this important work.

Amending the Definition of At-Risk Community

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) contains a problematic definition for "at-risk community": "*wildland urban interface communities within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire*".

The "vicinity of Federal lands" language has long been viewed as a problem by NASF because it is very restrictive, excluding communities that have been identified as "at risk" by state wildfire risk assessments and other collaboratively developed tools used by Federal and state agencies, such as the Pacific Northwest Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment and the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal.

NASF looks forward to sharing our specific legislative language with Members of the Subcommittee to rectify this longstanding pitfall with the 2023 Farm Bill.

Address Projected Risks of Forest Conversion

The 2010 Resources Planning Act Assessment (RPA) outlines the magnitude of the conversion challenge facing America's private forests—between 16 and 34 million acres projected to be lost to urban sprawl and development by 2060. The impacts of a loss of this magnitude will be felt across all the ecosystem services and economic benefits forests provide to the region—clean air and water, rural jobs and economic stimulus, wildlife habitat, and more. This challenge necessitates a dedicated and robust policy intervention.

NASF supports installing programmatic recognition of the importance in supporting local planning decisions. The key to the loss of forestland across the country lies in a lack of information employed during individual local land use planning decisions, hence the need to support information delivery to local planners and decision makers. RPA finds that a variety of analytical tools exist to evaluate management and policy options to maintain intact natural ecosystems. NASF proposes that the farm bill articulate an authority and funding provision within the USFS Forest Stewardship and Urban and Community Forestry Programs that provides special technical assistance services and analysis capabilities for local governments to utilize data, models and analytical tools developed by RPA and other research institu-

tions to promote interpretation of forest resource data in growth management planning.

NASF supports installing a tax credit for land managed under a Forest Stewardship Plan. In many states, greenbelt or present-use valuation programs exist to support the retention of working forests on the landscape through preferential property tax treatment; however, no similar tax incentives exist in Federal Tax Code. Since loss of forest land is considered an issue of national and regional consequence, Federal tax recognition of the economic challenges of keeping forests on the landscape is appropriate, especially as market values or highest-use assessments of land increase and there is a greater incentive to convert these lands to other developed uses. NASF proposes a Federal tax credit instead of a deduction for property tax paid on forestlands that are enrolled in the Forest Stewardship Program or comparable programs which show ongoing sustainable management. NASF notes that should a Forest Stewardship Plan become more attractive to landowners as a result of this tax treatment then annual appropriations for the program must increase to support increased workload on State Forestry agencies in preparing and monitoring those plans.

Extend and Enhance the 2014 Farm Bill Insect & Disease (I&D) Infestation Authority

The 2014 Farm Bill provided states with the opportunity to highlight the scope and scale of the insect and disease epidemic on the National Forest System. In cooperation with states, the Forest Service has designated approximately 74 million acres nationwide as insect and disease treatment areas, but only a fraction of those acres have been treated. The lack of active management on Federal lands is threatening the continued flow of social, economic, and ecological values from our Federal forests as millions of acres continue to be impacted by insects, diseases, and uncharacteristic wildfires.

NASF supports the extension of the September 30, 2023 sunset date to initiate scoping in order to utilize certain Healthy Forest Restoration Act processes for priority projects in designated I&D treatment areas; as well as increasing the farm bill I&D 3,000 acre categorical exclusion (CE) to 15,000 acres + acres or larger.

Amend and Modernize the Eligibility Requirements for the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program

The current requirements are 40+ years old, and do not adequately represent the full suite of today's VFDs who need funding to protect the communities they serve from wildfire. The eligibility requirements for this program need to be updated and the authorizing language streamlined.

Enhance the Conservation Stewardship Program

By acreage, CSP is the largest working lands conservation program in the country. It provides landowners a yearly payment for implementing enhanced conservation practices that go beyond basic conservation standards. Landowners must compete to enter the program and are deemed more competitive if they implement a "bundle" of enhancement practices. Under current regulation, forest landowners only have one bundle option: a set of enhancements aimed at improved wildlife habitat. Enhancement E612A involves converting cropland to trees for water quality protection. This practice would also increase carbon sequestration, but with the greatest volumes being sequestered 10 years following planting. A bundle of enhancements should be constructed around extending contracts for tree plantings and optimizing carbon uptake in standing timber. This could be constructed in a manner that also improves water quality and wildlife habitat.

Support Source Water Protection and Stormwater Management

Provision of water quality and management of stormwater runoff are two critical benefits provided by well-managed forests and are thus essential to keeping forests on the landscape. About 800 million forested acres in the U.S.—covering roughly 1/3 of the country's land area—filter and supply more than 50% of the nation's drinking water. The rest of America's drinking water is sourced from watersheds that many researchers suggest could be improved through reforestation efforts and enhanced forest management. The water resource benefits that forests provide can be maximized through thoughtful forest planning and carefully applied management practices. Privately owned forests constitute about 60% of U.S. forests. Of those 445 million acres, non-corporate family forestland owners manage about 2/3, or 298 million acres. This means that purely based on volume, small-tract woodland owners as a collective have the opportunity to make a substantial positive impact on forest health—and ultimately watershed health—through forest management.

NASF supports amending the 2018 Farm Bill language directing “10% of conservation program funding to be used for practices that protect source water for drinking water” to ensure greater priority is placed on surface water/forests (as opposed to groundwater).

Address Administrative Barriers to Forestry

In addition to producing legislative change to improve and streamline Federal programs delivering forestry assistance, the farm bill serves an important influential function in encouraging the Administration to pursue certain actions. In this regard, we are eager to work with the Administration and its partners to utilize the tools and funding authorized by the farm bill to ensure and fulfill Congressional intent.

There has been a growing demand for and use of forestry practices by landowners using cost-share assistance through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). However, while the demand appears fairly spatially uniform across the nation, the use of and priority placed on forestry practices varies substantially from state to state. There are a number of potential explanations (*i.e.*, familiarity with practices, technical proficiency, interpersonal relationships, *etc.*); however, it is critical that forestry assistance is available to interested landowners in all states. NRCS should be encouraged to think programmatically about how to foster growth of forestry cost-share assistance in all states, especially those where forestry assistance has not traditionally been embraced as a priority but in which landowner demand exists.

NASF supports the growth of forestry assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) by requiring state offices/technical committees to assess and establish priority forestry practices, as well as the expanded use of and financial support to State Forestry agencies to serve as Technical Service Providers (TSPs) for NRCS programs.

Support the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Program

NASF supports expanding the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership program (Joint Chiefs), as codified in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, to include an enhanced focus on invasive species control, and expanding eligible activities to allow treatments for erosion control materials and resource concerns related to native wildlife species, such as feral ungulates, small mammal predator control, invasive ants, and other insects.

Additionally, NASF supports including a prioritization in Joint Chiefs and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program for projects/proposals linked to a state’s Forest Action Plan.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today and provide testimony on behalf of NASF. We appreciate the ongoing work of this Subcommittee to provide Federal and state forest managers, as well as private landowners, with tools that increase the pace and scale of science based, sustainable active forest management, cross boundary work, and rapid and effective response to insects, disease and wildland fire.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee, our partners with us here today and our Federal partners, including the Forest Service and NRCS on these matters, providing the collective insights of the nation’s State Foresters in developing the 2023 Farm Bill. We are unified by a common goal: to support the health of America’s trees and forests and the rural and urban communities which rely on them.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Shultzabarger, for your testimony and your thoughts on that. We look forward to posing some questions a little bit later in the hearing today, I appreciate your thoughts.

So let’s send it over to Mr. Brandt for 5 minutes. Go when you are ready.

**STATEMENT OF HON. R. SKIPPER “SKIP” BRANDT,
COMMISSIONER, IDAHO COUNTY, ID; REPRESENTATIVE,
WESTERN INTERSTATE REGION BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES, GRANGEVILLE, ID**

Mr. BRANDT. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Thompson, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the

Subcommittee. Thank you for holding this hearing as negotiations are underway for the 2023 Farm Bill to see how we can strengthen the partnership between counties and Federal counterparts.

I am here today on behalf of the National Association of Counties. My name is Skip Brandt, and I serve as a County Commissioner in Idaho County, Idaho, since 2007. I am a lifelong Idaho County resident. Although we only have just over 17,000 residents, Idaho County is the largest county in the state by area. We have 5.5 million acres of land in our borders; 4.5 million acres of those lands are federally managed. That is larger than Connecticut and Rhode Island put together.

While the National Forests within our jurisdiction represent a major economic asset for our communities we serve, many of those challenges that we face are also rooted in those public lands and our relationships with the Federal agencies that manage them. The 2023 Farm Bill represents a unique opportunity to reexamine the role of the counties in management of the public lands and consider a new approach of Federal policy that can better support current challenges from the counties' perspective and other local governments.

Therefore, I would like to discuss a few points for the Committee's consideration. First, counties can serve as an integral role in the management of public lands throughout the country. Powers authorized in the farm bill such as the Good Neighbor Authority and shared stewardship contracting allow counties to partner with the Federal agencies to jointly plan and implement land management decisions. County government can also contribute resources and expertise as a cooperating agency under NEPA and often bring much-needed insight into local conditions that may otherwise be absent from the discussions. In turn, counties can provide essential services, law enforcement, infrastructure, as well as search and rescue.

Idaho County has enjoyed a strong working relationship with the Forest Service. Most recently, we partnered with the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest on a Selway-Middle Fork Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project. Despite the success that we have enjoyed in working with our Federal partners, we often are hampered in the ability to help them manage our forest in support of our communities. Our county government operates under the economic constraints that 83 percent of our land is under Federal management and therefore exempt from local taxes.

We must also deal with the complications presented by our limited ability to influence Federal land management decisions and the bureaucratic obstacles that interfere with the Forest Service's mission to accomplish good managed forest. This has been particularly an area of concern, given the increase of catastrophic wildfires, most of which ignite on Federal lands. In the past, the Forest Service spent the bulk of its dollars on forest management such as timber harvest and mechanical thinning. Instead, wildfire suppression has become its major priority today. This means fewer and fewer resources are being devoted to treatment of the forest every year, a challenge that is amplified by the Forest Service's ongoing struggles in hiring and retaining employees.

Through the farm bill's forestry title, there are additional tools that our Federal partners can leverage to help local governments address natural resource management challenges. First, we can continue to promote the collaboration in Public Lands Management by reauthorizing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and the Landscape Scale Restoration Program. When talking about truly treating the land to combat wildfire, a few—100 acre project is simply inadequate to get the job done. Reauthorizing these crucial programs would allow local government to partner with the Forest Service and give them more capacity to get things done on the ground.

Finally, counties support fully extending the eligibility under the Good Neighbor Authority to counties. In the 2018 Farm Bill, counties and Tribes were not afforded the same authority as states to retain and reinvest GNA project receipts. Ensuring that counties can take full advantage of the Good Neighbor Authority will facilitate better land management decisions that are based on local impacts and needs.

Chairman LaMalfa and Ranking Member Salinas, thank you for this opportunity, and thank you for inviting me to testify today. I just note that the lands will be managed one way or the other. They can be lightly managed by us, or they are going to be managed by Mother Nature. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Brandt follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. R. SKIPPER "SKIP" BRANDT, COMMISSIONER, IDAHO COUNTY, ID; REPRESENTATIVE, WESTERN INTERSTATE REGION BOARD OF DIRECTORS, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES, GRANGEVILLE, ID

[Chairman LaMalfa], Ranking Member Salinas, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to discussing the county role in public lands management and sharing recommendations for how the 2023 Farm Bill can strengthen the partnership between counties and our Federal partners in the successful management of our public lands. We appreciate the opportunity to work toward our shared goal of promoting stewardship practices that can support both healthier forests and more dynamic communities across rural America.

My name is Skip Brandt. I am a County Commissioner in Idaho County, Idaho, a role I've held since I was first elected in 2007. In my role as Commissioner, I serve as the Idaho representative to the National Association of Counties' (NACo) Western Interstate Region Board of Directors and also serve on NACo's Public Lands Steering Committee. NACo is the only national organization that represents all 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs in the United States, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo assists county governments in pursuing excellence in public service to produce healthy, vibrant, safe and resilient communities across the country.

I am a lifelong resident of Idaho County, born in the county seat of Grangeville and raised in the town of Kooskia. In addition to my role as Commissioner, I've also served as a City Councilmember, Mayor, and a three-term Idaho State Senator. Up until 2 years ago, I owned and operated a local building supply store. I care deeply about my community, and I want to see it thrive through the promotion of a revitalized timber industry, greater recreation opportunities on public lands, healthy forests, and clean sources of water for our residents and visitors. Unfortunately, Idaho County and counties like it across America face numerous challenges stemming from our public lands that have negatively impacted the health of our environment and the livelihoods of our residents.

With a total area of roughly 8,500² miles, Idaho County is the largest county in the state and the only county that spans the entire Idaho panhandle, sharing borders with both Oregon and Montana. Grangeville is approximately 220 miles north of our state capital, Boise. With a population of just over 17,000, Idaho County is also distinctly rural in character. Like much of rural Idaho, Idaho County experiences higher rates of poverty relative to the rest of the state. The county's median

household income is about \$47,000—almost \$16,000 lower than the state average—while Idaho County’s unemployment rate of 4.9 percent is two percentage points higher than the state average.

Many of the challenges facing Idaho County, as well as many potential opportunities, are rooted in our public lands. Idaho County contains over 4,400,000 acres—almost 7,000² miles—of Federal land within its boundaries, larger than the entire areas of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. No county in the country outside Alaska has as much land under Federal management. Roughly half of this land—2,200,000 acres—is locked up behind wilderness designations that restrict its use. Most of Idaho County’s public lands belong to the National Forest System (NFS) and are divided between six different National Forests:

- Nez Perce National Forest—2,224,091 acres
- Clearwater National Forest—870,807 acres
- Payette National Forest—804,853 acres
- Bitterroot National Forest—464,108 acres
- Salmon National Forest—66,074 acres
- Wallowa National Forest—1,787 acres

Regardless of location, size or scope of services, all counties support stewardship practices that can sustain both healthier forests and more dynamic communities across America. The 2023 Farm Bill presents a unique opportunity to reexamine the county role in public lands management and restructure Federal policy that can better support current challenges counties experience on the local level.

Today, I will discuss the following points for your consideration as the Subcommittee assesses challenges and opportunities for the Forestry Title of the 2023 Farm Bill:

- **Counties play an integral role in public lands management across the country.**
- **Despite our role in forest management, counties are oftentimes hampered in our ability to manage our forests.**
- **Through the reauthorization of the farm bill, there are additional tools that our Federal partners can leverage to further help local governments address natural resource management challenges.**

Counties play an integral role in public lands management across the country.

Counties work with state and Federal partners to manage public lands in several key capacities.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), counties are entitled to formally participate with Federal partners as a cooperating agency. By becoming a cooperating agency, a county can contribute its expertise to the environmental analysis process for land management projects, often bringing relevant insight and data on local economic, social, and community conditions, as well as integration opportunities with local natural resource plans and related efforts.

In turn, counties can engage in joint management projects with Federal agencies through powers authorized in the farm bill, such as the Good Neighbor Authority and Shared Stewardship Contracting. These allow county governments, along with states and Tribes, to enter into long-term agreements with Federal agencies to collaborate on land management projects within their jurisdictions. However, counties lack the authority to collect receipts from the sale of forest products from these projects and invest them in additional conservation or restoration initiatives, as our state counterparts can do. This hampers our ability to plan and execute local visions of public lands management that serve the needs of our residents.

Idaho County has enjoyed a strong relationship with Federal land management agencies that operate within our borders. Along with other land managers and local stakeholders, we work with USFS on projects in our National Forests as members of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative. Specifically, the Collaborative has partnered with the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests on the Selway-Middle Fork Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project. Completed from 2010 to 2019, we were able to jointly implement a wide variety of treatments across 1.4 million acres in the Selway-Middle Fork project area, including hazardous fuel removal, invasive species management, and outdoor recreation enhancements.

Despite our role in forest management, counties are oftentimes hampered in our ability to manage our forests and support our communities.

Despite the success that we've enjoyed in our work with the USFS and other land management agencies, Idaho County and counties across the nation still face significant challenges that threaten our ability to adequately manage our forests and support the livelihoods of our communities that depend on our public lands. Idaho County understands the need to protect our natural resources. In addition to forestry, public lands recreation and tourism are major economic drivers in our communities. However, relying on recreation and tourism will not provide us with the diversified and dynamic economy this is necessary for long-term economic resilience, particularly when our communities are faced with the impacts of reduced timber harvests and the long-term decline of the forest products industry that still serves as the backbone of our local economy.

While the National Forests within the county's jurisdiction represent a major economic asset for our communities, it also means that Idaho County's government operates under the economic constraint that 83.5 percent of our land is under Federal management—and therefore exempt from local taxation. Because of this, we are extremely limited when it comes to financing our vital county operations and services.

Unfortunately, this obstacle is not unique to Idaho County. Sixty-two percent of counties across the country have Federal land within their boundaries. Since the advent of our Federal lands system, counties with significant portions of untaxable public lands have struggled to make up revenue shortfalls, especially over the past 30 years as Federal regulations drastically reduced timber harvests within the NFS. Even though we are not able to collect property taxes on Federal land, county governments must still provide essential services for our residents and those who visit these public lands each year. Such services include road and bridge maintenance, law enforcement, search and rescue, emergency medical care, fire protection, solid waste disposal and environmental compliance.

Idaho County not only is mandated by the state to provide a broad range of local government services with a limited tax base, but we must also deal with the complications presented by the land management decisions made by Federal land management agencies. While we work closely with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to better manage the resources under their control, we are restricted in our ability to influence outcomes on Federal land within our jurisdiction.

The landscape-scale catastrophic wildfires in the National Forests in Idaho and other Western states have had a disproportionately large impact on the ecological, social and economic life of Idaho County and our neighbors. The threat of wildfires has only worsened in recent years. Fire seasons last an average of 78 days longer compared to 40 years ago. As a result, wildfire suppression eats up a greater share of the USFS budget every year. In the past, the USFS spent the bulk of its dollars on forest management, such as timber harvests and mechanical thinning, whereas today, suppression has become its major priority. Today, more staff is devoted to fighting fires than managing the forests. This challenge is amplified by USFS' ongoing challenges in hiring and retaining its workforce.

Counties believe that active forest management is a cornerstone of responsible public lands stewardship. By reducing fuel loads within our National Forest System, we can combat the threat of catastrophic wildfires while in the process creating a healthy, thriving ecosystem that improves the economy of rural communities and the environment. Healthy forests contribute to clean water supplies and improved air quality. Biodiversity increases when we manage our forests in sound, scientific ways. Local economies see the benefits of both resource use and recreation. Nobody loses when our forests are healthy and resilient.

We can achieve these goals by increasing timber harvests from our National Forests, reducing fuel loads through more mechanical thinning and controlled burns, reducing red tape through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process, and combating frivolous special interest lawsuits that serve only to delay much-needed management of our National Forest System.

Through the reauthorization of the farm bill, there are additional tools that our Federal partners can leverage to further help local governments address natural resource management challenges.

The pending reauthorization of the farm bill poses significant opportunities to shape Federal policy that can better address the challenges that counties like Idaho County face. The farm bill is critical for county governments that are charged with delivering vital services to many of our nation's vulnerable communities. From clean water and broadband infrastructure to nutrition assistance and energy conservation—the farm bill helps all of America's counties access the resources they need to invest in strong and resilient communities.

The forestry title of the 2023 Farm Bill gives Congress its best chance in 5 years to build the partnership between counties and our Federal partners to tackle our shared land management goals.

Counties support the following priorities for the Forestry Title of the 2023 Farm Bill:

Promote Collaborative Land Management by Reauthorizing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) and the Landscape-Scale Restoration (LSR) Program

Counties believe that active management of Federal lands and forests must be done in a sustainable manner that ensures the health of our Federal lands for generations to come. However, agencies like the USFS and BLM are hamstrung by their bureaucratic processes and inability to hire and retain employees. Allowing counties and Tribes to participate on the same level as the states would allow local governments to collaborate with the agency, providing more capacity to get work done on the ground. One way to help ensure a balanced approach to address natural resource management challenges is by promoting locally driven collaborative processes that promote consensus-driven decision making. Counties across the United States have engaged in collaborative efforts to address their natural resources challenges. By bringing a broad cross-section of local stakeholders into collaborative processes, counties, industry, outdoorsmen, conservationists, and Federal and state land managers have built consensus on some of the most complex natural resource management challenges.

To do so, counties call on Congress to ensure that the appointment process for the USFS Resource Advisory Committees (RAC) is streamlined to ensure that appointees are approved promptly. Counties also support the reauthorization of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) and the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Program. When talking about truly treating the land to combat wildfire and improve forest health, a few hundred-acre projects are simply inadequate to get the job done. By enabling stronger partnerships with county governments, programs like CFLRP and LSR give our agency partners real options to carry out meaningful landscape treatments. In turn, improving the process of authorizing limited and reasonable categorical exclusions for projects that improve forest health and have been developed through consensus-based collaborative processes will increase the number of acres treated and help to reduce the threat of wildfire.

Support Revenue Sharing for Shared Stewardship Contracts and Good Neighbor Agreements

Counties support the reauthorization and expansion of shared stewardship contracting authorities for Federal land management agencies. In addition to improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk, increased active management will generate more revenue for the Federal treasury and critical services provided by counties, while promoting job creation and economic growth in counties across the nation. The growth in stewardship contracting in recent years has shown that a market-driven approach to forest management projects can achieve both forest management goals and increased production.

Counties support and are active partners in stewardship contracting initiatives across the United States, but unlike under a traditional Federal timber harvest, counties are not eligible for a 25 percent share of the revenues generated from a stewardship contract. Forest revenue sharing payments support critical county services such as transportation infrastructure and education. America's counties look forward to working with Congress to further strengthen forest revenue sharing between counties and the Federal Government by making counties eligible for 25 percent of the revenues generated from stewardship contracts.

Additionally, counties call on Congress to expand the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to enhance the ability of the USFS and BLM to partner with counties on Federal forest restoration and management projects. The GNA program has allowed the USFS to partner with states on Federal forest restoration and management projects to improve wildlife habitats, enhance watersheds, and reduce wildfire risks. In the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress amended GNA to make Tribes and counties eligible to enter into Good Neighbor Agreements. However, counties and Tribes were not afforded the same authority as states to retain GNA project receipts to reinvest in management projects, reducing a significant incentive to partner with USFS. Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill removed the ability for restoration services to take place off Federal lands. This means adjacent state, county, and Tribal land that is essential to the health and productivity of National Forests can no longer be restored as comprehensive landscapes.

Good Neighbor Agreements strengthen the partnership with Federal land management agencies and state, county and Tribal governments. Standardizing the use of GNA funds will help counties support forest management projects and facilitate better land management decisions based on local impacts and needs. To accomplish these goals, counties support the inclusion of H.R. 4705/S.2492—Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act, proposed by Senator James Risch and Representative Russ Fulcher in the 117th Congress in the 2023 Farm Bill.

Conclusion

Chairman [LaMalfa] and Ranking Member Salinas, thank you for inviting me to share Idaho County's story.

Counties stand ready to work with Congress and our Federal partners to develop a 2023 Farm Bill that will improve the health of our Federal forests. Counties continue to serve as essential partners in public lands management, as well as leaders in improving forest health across the country. We look forward to working with you to achieve our shared priorities for promoting responsible forest management that can serve the needs of our rural communities and the environment.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Indeed. Thank you, Mr. Brandt.

Let's go to Mr. Imbergamo for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM "BILL" IMBERGAMO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FEDERAL FOREST RESOURCE COALITION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Bill Imbergamo, and I am the Executive Director of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition. And I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. And we are very grateful for this Committee's efforts to streamline management of the National Forests, but I want to urge every Member of this Subcommittee to recall the horrific conditions we have seen in recent summers. While it is cold and wet now and it appears it will never stop snowing in the Sierras, we must remember that 80 million acres of National Forests are at high risk to wildfire, insects, and drought. In 2020 and 2021, severe fires blanketed the entire country with smoke, with most of those fires burning on National Forest land. While Congress reacted by giving the Forest Service new funding and new authorities to restore our forest, much more remains to be done.

I want to hit on some important context straight away. More than ½ of the National Forest System is already in highly restricted land uses, including wilderness areas, roadless areas, and others. The critical authorities this Committee has enacted, including permanent stewardship contracting, expanding Good Neighbor Authority, and categorical exclusions do not open those lands to timber harvest. They do not waive a single forest plan standard or guideline. They merely give the Forest Service new tools to expedite management and work with partners on lands that are supposed to be managed under current law.

And as I noted, my members work in communities surrounded by National Forests, and many spend their days working on the forest themselves, conducting management that creates wildlife habitat, reduces hazardous fuels, and provides raw materials which support domestic manufacturing jobs in rural communities. In the 2023 Farm Bill, we urge the Committee to build on the work done in previous farm bills, which were enacted with strong bipartisan support, and were signed by Presidents from both parties.

And today, I want to focus on two key items from my written statement. First, proposed changes to stewardship contracting, and second, key modifications to the Good Neighbor program, which are very consistent with the remarks of the previous witnesses.

Stewardship contracting has been in use for almost a quarter century and was made permanent in 2014 Farm Bill. Stewardship contracts allow the Forest Service to trade goods for services, including using the value of timber to help pay for wildlife habitat improvement and other activities. Congress established seven land management goals for stewardship, all of which are equal and equally laudable. Since it was enacted, it has become apparent that management goals are unattainable if there is no capacity to achieve them. Where there are no loggers, truckers, or wood-consuming facilities like sawmills, papermills, or biomass energy plants, it is either prohibitively expensive or otherwise impossible to conduct forest management activities.

Throughout the National Forest System, stewardship treatment costs can vary widely depending on whether there is a market for the wood or not. Where there are robust markets, treatments can pay for themselves. Where that is not the case, treatment costs can run between \$3,000 and \$6,000 per acre. That is why we are recommending adding an additional land management goal to the stewardship contracting, encouraging the retention of existing forest products' infrastructure. This goal would not override the other goals established by Congress. It would merely make it an additional, coequal goal.

Likewise, with Good Neighbor Authority, this Committee has taken the lead on expanding the authority to all 50 states and making Tribes and counties eligible. However, as the other witnesses have noted, the 2018 bill restricted the use of GNA receipts to Federal lands. This restriction appeared in the bill at the last minute as the conference committee was winding down, and it threatens to defeat the purposes of the program and dampen state interest in participation. We urge you to make GNA permanent for both the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management and to allow GNA partners, including states, counties, and Tribes to retain some of the receipts generated by GNA projects.

We also urge you to amend GNA to allow for a limited amount of road construction. GNA projects could help relocate poorly designed roads to areas where they cause less concern and thus help address the substantial road maintenance backlog on our National Forests.

We also urge the Committee to consider adding language directing the Forest Service to cut and remove hazard trees to safely reopen roads following catastrophic fires. Too often, we see large areas of National Forest land become inaccessible for emergency response, recreational access, and future management following large fires.

These changes and those discussed in depth in our written statement are intended to retain wood-using facilities, generate value from forest management, and help cover the costs associated with restoring our National Forests. In addition to hazardous fuels reduction, forest management can help create and maintain a wide variety of habitat types, including habitats for listed species like

the red-cockaded woodpecker and Kirtland’s warbler and declining species like the ruffed grouse.

In conclusion, I appreciate the opportunity to testify and to discuss some of our priorities with you, and I look forward to working with you on a bill that improves the health of our forests and our rural communities.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Imbergamo follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM “BILL” IMBERGAMO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FEDERAL FOREST RESOURCE COALITION, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, which represents purchasers of Federal timber in 37 states, with over 650 member companies and affiliated associations, collectively representing over 390,000 employees.

FFRC is extremely grateful for the leadership this Committee has shown on National Forest Management issues in the last several farm bills, which have advanced some of the most effective and important policy changes aiding the Forest Service efforts to reverse the forest health and wildfire crisis that is challenging the sustainability of our Federal Forests.

The 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills saw the expansion of Good Neighbor Authority, expansion of Designation by Description and Designation by Prescription, permanent reauthorization of Stewardship End-Results Contracting, and enactment of streamlined authorities to treat forest insects, disease, and reduce hazardous fuel loads on National Forests.

The 2023 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to build on these successes to scale up management to meet the significant challenges facing the health and sustainability of the National Forest System.

Good Neighbor Reform: The 2014 Farm Bill expanded Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to all 50 states, following years of pilot authorities which allowed small scale work in several states. The 2018 Farm Bill expanded the GNA to counties and Tribes. The program has been a resounding success and we urge the Subcommittee to build upon it in the 2023 Farm Bill. Since expanding the authority in the 2014 Bill, the number of acres treated annually under this program has grown by more than twenty-fold and is averaging more than 60,000 acres each year for the last 4 years.

Since the 2014 Bill, more than three dozen states have begun work on over 380 GNA projects, tripling the number of acres treated. In addition to improving forest health, GNA has helped increase wood supply to bring additional needed forest products to market.

The amount of Forest Service timber sold under GNAs has increased from 14.4 million board feet in FY 2016 to 262.9 million board feet in FY 2019. That’s enough lumber to frame more than 20,000 single family homes. As many Americans struggle with finding affordable housing, this program is helping meet increased demand for housing.

With states investing substantial sums of money to support implementation of Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) projects, including cross-boundary projects, treatment of revenue from GNA projects must reflect this reality.

The 2018 Farm Bill limited the ability of states to utilize GNA project receipts on non-Federal lands—despite the clear direction in the legislation that these projects be conducted to improve forest health on both Federal and non-Federal lands. We note that this recommendation is consistent with those provided by the National Association of State Foresters.

Action Requested:

- Amend 16 U.S. Code §2113b(2)(c) to **allow States, Counties, and Tribes to retain revenues generated through Good Neighbor projects** on non-Federal lands, pursuant to conditions specified in Good Neighbor Agreements, and direct the Forest Service to update existing Good Neighbor Master Agreements and Project Agreements to use revenue from existing projects for this work.
- We also recommend that Congress consider amendments to the GNA authority to **allow new road construction and reconstruction under GNA contracts on a limited basis**. Restoration work on the National Forest System is not limited the need to reduce hazardous fuels; in many cases, older roads, placed without adequate consideration of water quality impacts, should be retired and replaced by better engineered, correctly placed roads that address water quality

issues as well as roads that are just worn out and need reconstruction such as crushed aggregate and vegetation removal for safe and efficient use.

- As you move to reauthorize these programs, we urge you **to make the above changes and extend the authority for this program to the Bureau of Land Management** (BLM) as well. The 2014 and 2018 Bills extended several forest management authorities to the BLM, and this Committee should build upon that precedent in the 2023 bill.

Stewardship Contracting Amendments: The 2014 Farm Bill made Stewardship Contracting authority permanent, responding to a request from then-Chief Tom Tidwell. Stewardship Contracting has been a vital authority allowing the Forest Service to implement forest restoration and management projects. Stewardship Contracts now account for about 25 percent of overall Forest Service timber sale volume, and in some regions, this total has grown to exceed 50 percent.

As the use of this contracting tool has expanded, it has become clear that reforms are needed to ensure that the program doesn't result in unintended consequences, including inadequate resources for reforestation. Moreover, as the Forest Service struggles to expand its treatment of at-risk acres of National Forest System lands, it's become clear that retention of existing forest products infrastructure—loggers, trucking capacity, and wood products facilities—is critical to achieving the paradigm shift the Forest Service has called for.

In the last 3 years, we've seen the closure of seven sawmills located near millions of acres of fire prone National Forests, including mills in Oregon, Montana, and South Dakota. All these closures were precipitated—at least in part—due to insufficient wood supply from nearby National Forests. Loss of milling infrastructure is a major factor behind what the Forest Service calls its “low-value material” problem.

Our initial analysis of Forest Service Forest Inventory & Analysis data show that there are substantial quantities of standing sawtimber on unreserved (non-Wilderness, non-Roadless) National Forest System lands across the United States. Using what are known as Integrated Resource Timber Contracts (IRTC's), the Forest Service can generate additional revenues to expand treatments—including non-commercial thinning, prescribed fire, and improved fish passage—while supporting family-wage, year-round jobs in forest management and wood products industries.

By contrast, if nearby mills close, experience has taught us that attracting new investment—particularly where there are few non-Federal forests to support a forest products industry—can be extremely difficult. Following the loss of most sawmilling capacity in Arizona, the Forest Service has struggled for over 12 years to attract a capable, well capitalized industry to help it accomplish forest management work that will protect watersheds and communities from catastrophic fire.

Action Requested:

Amend 16 U.S. Code §6591c to **strike Section (e)(B)** and **add clarifying language that requires deposits in the Knutson-Vandenberg Fund** (authorized by 16 U.S.C. § 576) for Stewardship End-Results Contracts that include merchantable timber.

Further, amend the purposes of Stewardship End-Results Contracting Projects (16 U.S. Codes § 6591(c)) **to add an eighth “land management goal” of retaining and expanding existing forest products infrastructure**, including logging capacity and wood consuming facilities, in proximity to the National Forests.

Last, amend Stewardship Contracting Authority to **allow some portion of retained receipts to help pay for required NEPA analysis** for Stewardship projects.

Encourage Restoration Work and Prevent Fire Escapes: We urge the Committees to use the 2023 Farm Bill to:

- Create a Federal **prescribed fire claims fund** to address the risk of prescribed fire escapes or damages in instances when Stewardship contractors adhere to identified best practices. Ensure that this fund indemnifies project funders in addition to contractors, and develop national standards for “gross negligence” to define best practices.
- Create a **cost-share program for the establishment and maintenance of fuel breaks** on non-Federal forest and range land.
- Expedite the **contracting process for forest thinning and fuels reduction** on high priority fireheds by:
 - Directing the Forest Service to **identify areas within priority fireheds which need fuels reduction work.**
 - **Solicit proposals for either commercial forest thinning or non-commercial hazardous fuels reduction.**

- Cover each project with (at a minimum) **a 3,000 acre Categorical Exclusion** (either the hazardous fuels reduction, insect and disease treatment, or fuel break CE's).
- **Amend the National Forest Management Act** (Sec. 14(d)) to **increase the maximum dollar value of direct sale contracts**, currently capped at \$10,000. This amount was enacted into law in 1976 with no adjustment for inflation. Congress should **increase the value to \$52,000** and require the Forest Service **to adjust the capped amount for inflation each year**.
- Congress should make clear that timber volume sold or acres awarded through these direct contracts are expected to **produce both increased volume and acres treated** above the projects funded through the Forest Products and Hazardous Fuels Reduction line items.

Improving the Effectiveness of Farm Bill Insect and Disease, Hazardous Fuels Reduction Authorities: Beginning in the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress provided the Forest Service with the authority to “categorically exclude” insect and disease treatments on up to 3,000 acres of National Forest System lands. The 2018 Farm Bill expanded this authority to allow for hazardous fuels reduction work on acres designated using this authority.

These authorities have proven effective in expediting needed forest management work. However, the size of the areas allowed to be treated is too small to effectively prevent catastrophic fires. The Caldor Fire in California provided numerous examples of effective fuels treatments using the farm bill CE.

Within that fire's 221,000 acre burned footprint, there were at least five areas treated using the Insect & Disease and hazardous fuels mitigation CE's. In every case, where the Forest Service had completed all the steps of the fuels reduction process, the treatments reduced flame length, fire intensity, and rate of spread.

However, the treatments were not conducted on enough acres to prevent the fire from being the first in history to burn over the crest of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Assuming all five categorical exclusions treated the 3,000 acre maximum, the treatments on the Caldor fire area amounted to 15,000 acres, or about seven percent of the fire area. If the Forest Service had been able to treat 15,000 acres under each CE, fire intensity and the damage resulting from it could have been reduced on fully 1/3 of the fire and may have even allowed firefighters to control the fire sooner.

It is critical to remember that the Categorical Exclusions provided to the Forest Service through the last two farm bills **do not open a single new acre of land to timber harvest**. Use of all Categorical Exclusions requires compliance with existing Forest Plans, including land allocations like designated Wilderness Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and other areas where removal of vegetation is prohibited. Categorical Exclusions merely allow the Forest Service to quickly approve needed treatments after a brief review, rather than engaging in lengthier NEPA processes that have delayed projects as small as 1,600 acres for as much as 5 years or more.

Requested Action: Amend 16 U.S. Code § 6591b to **increase the number of acres which can be treated for fuels reduction and pest treatment from 3,000 to 15,000 acres and to allow their use on any area designated as a priority landscape under the Forest Service 10 year wildfire strategy**.

Eliminate Unnecessary Restrictions on Infrastructure Spending: The Infrastructure Investments & Jobs Act (IIJA, Public Law 117-51) provided unprecedented investments over the next 5 years for a wide range of forest management actions on National Forest System lands. In effect, this bill both authorized and appropriated funds for several new programs that impact all operations of the National Forest System, including those created from outside the Public Domain. That places these programs firmly within the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Committee, and we'd urge you to carefully review them as the 2023 Farm Bill approaches.

Unfortunately, Congress chose to insert language limiting the application of these funds in ways that limits their effectiveness. For instance, the bill provided \$500 million over 5 years for “mechanical thinning and timber harvesting” and “pre-commercial thinning in young growth stands.” However, each of these actions is limited with extraneous or redundant restrictions, including a limitation on precommercial thinning to include only those projects that produce “wildlife benefits to provide subsistence resources.”

This requirement could be construed to limit the application of these new funds to only those National Forest System lands where a recognized Tribal government has valid subsistence rights, leaving large portions of the National Forest System ineligible for this important work.

Requested Action: Amend IIJA authorities to eliminate duplicative, unnecessary, or unhelpful limitations on management.

Streamline National Forest Management: Each National Forest is governed by a legally binding Forest Plan, developed through a collaborative process with ample opportunities for public involvement. Each Forest Plan designates some acres of National Forests as being “suited for timber production,” while also recommending areas for more restrictive land uses, like wilderness designations.

In practice, these Forest Plans take too long to develop, and frequently, they wind up producing binding restrictions on land management, while land management goals—like early seral habitat—are both difficult to achieve and are rarely monitored to determine whether they are attained. When the Forest Service proposes management actions—such as creation of young forests or thinning fire prone stands—the agency must begin entirely new NEPA processes that make fleeting—if any—reference to the underlying Forest Plan.

The result is both an overly long planning process, and project level analysis that is too dense and voluminous to be of any use to anyone except experts. While the quantity of information required to move forward with a management project is impressive, the quality and accessibility to the public, leaves much to be desired. Moreover, conflicting court precedents, such as the disastrous *Cottonwood* case, have left in legal limbo whether Forest Plans are “ongoing actions” under the law. This has left the Forest Service vulnerable to frivolous lawsuits that frequently block or delay needed management projects.

By one estimate, injunctions based on the erroneous *Cottonwood* precedent have stalled over 350 Million Board Feet of timber in the Forest Service Northern Region alone, enough timber to frame over 29,000 single family homes. Congress stepped in and provided a partial fix to this problem in the 2018 Omnibus Appropriations bill. The 2023 Farm Bill should be a vehicle to complete this work.

Requested Action: Clarify that Forest Plans are not “ongoing actions” for the purposes of Federal law and make clear that consultation under the Endangered Species Act Section 7 is not required at the plan level. Second, Congress should, through amendments to the National Forest Management Act, clarify that projects conducted on acres designated as suited for timber production should be subjected to reduced analytical requirements under other statutes. Planning for an accounting for “sensitive” resources on the National Forest System must grapple with the fact that about half the acres are in restricted land uses and will likely never see management.

Conclusion: FFRC appreciates the work this Committee has done to provide the Forest Service with streamlined authorities to accomplish needed work on the National Forests. As we’ve seen, the primary problem with these authorities is that they haven’t gone far enough, fast enough. The forest health crisis on our National Forests threatens not only the forest industry that depends on those forests, but millions of Americans who need them for clean air, clean water, and places to recreate. The forest industry is a tool to help achieve management objectives on our National Forests—ranging from hazardous fuels reduction to the creation and maintenance of habitat for multiple wildlife species.

By taking the steps outlined above, this Committee can help arrest the declines in forest health we’ve been witnessing for the last 30 years and put our forests on a better path. We look forward to working with the Committee and the other stakeholders on today’s panel to achieve these goals.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Imbergamo. I think I said it—Mr. IMBERGAMO. I answer to nearly anything.

The CHAIRMAN. More correctly that time, right? Okay. Thank you. It is important.

All right. Last, Mr. Holmes, you are up for 5 minutes. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF PATRICK HOLMES, SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR,
AMERICAN FORESTS, HELENA, MT**

Mr. HOLMES. Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I represent American Forests, the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the U.S.

Since our founding in 1875, we have been guided by a very simple premise, that the health and resiliency of the nation’s forests and of our forested communities goes hand in hand. Our organiza-

tion is very proud of a deep history, dating back to our role in convening the first American Forest Conservation Congress in 1882, of supporting the forestry conservation movement, and we continue that work today.

Notably, as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, we led the coalition efforts supporting the bipartisan Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees Act (H.R. 2049, 117th Congress), known as the REPLANT Act, which will provide the Forest Service with the funding to plant or support the natural growth of more than 1.2 billion trees over the next decade.

With that history in context, it is our pleasure to participate in this inaugural meeting of the Subcommittee and to formally thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your role as a lead sponsor of the REPLANT Act and for your current leadership alongside the Subcommittee for focusing deliberations in our field in the run up to this new farm bill. As our President and CEO Jad Daley often says, “We are one nation under trees.” Forestry has a unique capacity to respond to some of our greatest challenges as a nation and to unite us around our divergent interests around shared goals.

As Members and my fellow witnesses have testified today, our forests face great challenges, and American Forests is committed to ensuring that our forest land managers have the tools and the resources they need to respond. To that end, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115–334) made significant progress in areas of wildfire risk reduction, restoration of working forested landscapes, and bolstering markets for innovative wood products.

While our organization emphatically supports those efforts as part of an effort to accelerate forest restoration and preventative measures in the face of the many threats others have noted today, we also believe that we must intensify efforts to recover our forest resources. Wildfires cause approximately 80 percent of reforestation needs on National Forest System lands and, alongside other threats, create substantial needs across all ownerships.

Larger, more frequent, and more severe wildfires and shifting climate conditions are inhibiting our forests’ abilities to regenerate on their own, eliminating nearby seed sources, altering conditions for success, and encouraging invasive species and shrubs that transform fire regimes. These are the conditions that are ripe for severe reburns and altogether forest loss across large swaths of our western landscapes. Although we often cite a history of past fire suppression as one of the leading causes of our current wildfire risk, we may one day look back at our failure to respond to these recovery needs as a dominant driver of our future forests and fire risks.

A substantial portion of the 4 million acres of potential reforestation needs on National Forest System lands stems from wildfires over just a 2 year period of 2020 to 2021, which many have noted today was particularly severe. Passage of the REPLANT Act will help provide the resources to respond but will only address about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the current identified needs of just our National Forests and won’t extend to address the emergent needs we expect that are coming and the needs confronting other land ownerships and amid other threats.

To scale up, we must address a workforce and supply chain for reforestation that have atrophied among Federal, state, and Tribal

nation partners. It sorely needs to be modernized and expanded. We further need to improve our planning and reforestation practices to tackle new, evolving, real-world challenges. Many of the standard reforestation practices arose from controlled field trials, and they have to be adapted today to evaluate the source and genetics of different species and integrate fuels treatments to address recurring wildfire risks. No funding source or program is currently supporting this applied research and planning work, nor is any program unlocking innovative approaches to workforce needs across the supply chain among partners.

In response to these needs, we wish to highlight three top priorities for this farm bill. First, authorize and significantly increase appropriations for the Reforestation Nursery and Genetics Resource program, known as RNGR, within the Forest Service. RNGR is a vital but underfunded program. It needs to be expanded to at least \$10 million per year to establish a predictable program of work that benefit state and Tribal nurseries.

Second, establish a new competitive grant funding opportunity for reforestation research, nursery seed collection storage, and workforce needs. Our State Forest experiment stations, our colleges and universities can be leaders among public and private partners in helping to address these concerns.

And third, establish loan and loan guarantee financing for nurseries serving public, private, and urban reforestation and recovery needs. Financing to expand and build new nursery capacity remains an important bottleneck in the supply chain that constrains the scope and scale of our work.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today on behalf of American Forests. We look forward to being a leading and pragmatic voice on all facets of your forestry agenda for this farm bill and are grateful for all the work you will do on behalf of the nation's forests, your districts, and communities across the country moving forward.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Holmes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PATRICK HOLMES, SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR, AMERICAN FORESTS, HELENA, MT

Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas, and Members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I represent American Forests, the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the United States. Since our founding in 1875, our work has been guided by the simple notion that the health and resiliency of our nation's forests and communities, from coast to coast, goes hand in hand.

We led the First American Forest Congress in 1882 that marked the launch of the forest conservation movement, drawing 50,000 people. Our work helped to spark the creation of the U.S. Forest Service and the National Forest System with the Second American Forest Congress in 1905. We led the national effort to support passage of the Weeks Act of 1911, which established the first National Forests in the eastern U.S. and subsequently helped rally the nation for the Memorial Tree planting program that launched the urban forest movement in America and the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, drawing on American Forests' experience leading restoration of European forests after World War I. In the aftermath of World War II, we led efforts to plan for the recovery of America's forests—hit hard to feed wartime needs—while simultaneously producing enough timber to build housing for returning soldiers. We helped to pass the National Forest Management Act to bring balanced, multiple-use management to America's National Forests. We co-chaired the coalition that in 2018 secured enactment of the U.S. Forest Service "Wildfire Funding Fix," providing for adequate funding for wildfire suppression without the

need to further erode or borrow from other programs. Most recently, we championed efforts through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act to support funding for wildfire prevention, forest restoration and innovative wood products. Notably, as part of the IIJA, we led the coalition effort supporting the bipartisan Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees Act, known as the REPLANT Act, which will provide the United States Forest Service with funding to plant or support the natural growth of more than 1.2 billion trees over the next decade.

With that history as context, it is our distinct pleasure to participate in this inaugural meeting of the Subcommittee and to have this opportunity to formally thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your past leadership as a lead cosponsor of the REPLANT Act, and for your current leadership along with Subcommittee Members in focusing dialogue and deliberations in our field in the run-up to a new farm bill. As our President and CEO Jad Daley often says, “We are *one nation under trees*”—forestry has a unique capacity to respond to some of our greatest challenges as a nation and to unite divergent interests around shared goals. We hope and expect that forestry will continue to be a significant factor in the successful passage of a bipartisan and bicameral farm bill and look forward to being a leading pragmatic voice and resource for Members and their staff over the coming months.

As Members will no doubt appreciate, today our nation’s forests, public and private, rural and urban, face new threats from severe wildfire, drought, invasive species and insects and disease, owed to a history of past management decisions, resource constraints and the complicating factors of climate change. American Forests is committed to ensuring our public, urban and working forest land managers have the tools and resources they need to respond to these new threats and to safeguard the many values our forests provide, from diverse wood products, invaluable water supplies and clean air and carbon sequestration to abundant wildlife habitat, resilience to extreme heat, and a multitude of outdoor recreation, employment and economic opportunities.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 made significant progress expanding tools and resources for wildfire risk reduction and resilience on public and private lands, incentivizing management and restoration of working forested landscapes and bolstering markets for forest products that together lend credence to the notion that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure amid the threats facing our forests. These include provisions authorizing new financial assistance to states for hazardous fuel reduction projects that cross landownership boundaries; inclusion of the Timber Innovation Act provisions that establish, reauthorize and modify assistance programs to promote wood innovation for energy use and building construction and to facilitate the removal of forest biomass; and authorization of the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, a competitive grant program that promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes and furthers priorities identified in State Forest Action Plans or equivalent restoration strategies. American Forests and many of our partners believe that each of these changes and authorizations highlight opportunities for the Subcommittee to build from the prior farm bill’s success with additional tools and flexibilities to enhance our “all-hands, all lands” approach of stewardship and restoration and help build resilience in the face of threats that don’t stop at fence lines. That approach, and the additional program improvements it requires, will be our focus and that of our many national partners during this farm bill cycle.

Within current authorizations, American Forests supports the strategic framework and spending priorities of the Forest Service’s 10 year Wildfire Crisis Strategy to implement funding provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act and annual appropriations. The scale and impact of our largest wildfires demands an acceleration of forest management and restoration treatments, moving beyond “random acts of restoration” to targeted, outcome-driven investments to meet the needs of at-risk communities, infrastructure and natural resources. The agency’s approach to public and partner engagement, expedited implementation of grants and agreements, and recent adoption of large-scale partnership initiatives marks noteworthy progress. Notwithstanding this progress, we also believe there are significant opportunities for further improvement to accelerate implementation of authorities and programs addressed in IIJA, and to further unleash partnerships among local, state, Tribal nation, nonprofit and industry partners. In this moment, we must open the aperture to support new models of partnership and co-stewardship that foster predictability and consistency for needed programs of work and build from past progress.

American Forests believes that alongside preventative efforts, we must redouble our investment in programs for recovering our forest resources in the aftermath of severe impacts. Our forests are facing a chronic, quiet crisis: if we fail to accelerate

reforestation and long-term recovery in the aftermath of large-scale severe impacts, we risk further jeopardizing the many benefits and values they provide in the long run. Wildfire alone causes approximately 80 percent of reforestation needs on National Forest System lands; exacerbated by extreme weather and impacts from drought and insects and disease, it creates significant need across all ownerships. Large, stand-replacing fires lead to sizeable areas without nearby seed sources for regeneration, allowing encroaching shrubland and invasive species to quickly catalyze type conversions that alter future forest composition and fuel dynamics. These changes often create conditions ripe for severe reburns in the form of future rapidly spreading, high-severity wildfire events. Although we often cite a history of past fire suppression as a leading cause of our current wildfire crisis, we may one day look back at our failure to respond to these long-term recovery needs of largescale severe wildfire events as a dominant driver of our future fire risk.

A substantial portion of the over 4 million acres of potential reforestation needs on National Forest System lands stems from wildfires over just a 2 year period from 2020 to 2021, when more than 2.5 million acres of National Forest System lands burned at high severity, adding to the 1.54 million acres of previously identified and verified needs.¹ Recent passage of the REPLANT Act, which removes a cap on the Forest Service’s Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF), will provide significant resources to respond to these urgent needs. That said, the agency expects that annual expenditures from RTF—even with the additional help the REPLANT Act provides—will likely meet only about ¼ of the current identified needs, and may fall woefully short as severe conditions expand in future fire years.

At the same time, our systems, workforce and supply chain for reforestation have atrophied over the years among Federal, state and Tribal nation partners and must be modernized and expanded to respond to these emergent needs. Consider that our past seed collection, storage and nursery infrastructure were sited and undertaken to support reforestation in the aftermath of predictable harvest units and must now also be repurposed and expanded to service a far larger and more uncertain set of wildfire, extreme weather and insect and disease needs. In Colorado alone, our estimates indicate that reforesting just ten percent of the severely burned acreage from 2020 fires would require 16.6 million seedlings. Optimistically, we have enough Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir (the workhorse species) seed in storage to grow 16 million seedlings total, meaning we have just enough capacity in the queue to address ¼ of the needs from one single fire year, with zero capacity to reforest 90 percent of that year’s burn scars and 100 percent of the damage from all other years. This anecdote is indicative of conditions across many states. Expanding our seed collection, storage and nursery capacity presents a critical need in this supply chain.

There is also a need to support improved planning, assessment and reforestation practices to tackle evolving, real-world recovery needs. Many of the standard reforestation practices arose from controlled field trials focused on testing regular spacing densities and subsequent treatments such as thinning, fertilization and control of competing vegetation. Today, we must not only evaluate the appropriate species and genetics for reforestation, we must also adopt planting and site preparation practices that improve success rates under anticipated future climate and weather conditions and integrate effective short- and long-term fuels treatments—all with an eye toward recreating the kind of diversity in stand structure necessary to withstand future wildfire and other threats. No funding source or program is currently supporting this applied research, planning and assessment work for reforestation needs among Federal, state, private, Tribal nation, nonprofit and land grant university partners; just as concerning, there is no programmatic avenue to fund innovating new approaches to fix workforce constraints that pose a huge threat to effective implementation.

In response to these pressing needs, we wish to highlight three top priorities for our organization for this farm bill:

First, authorize and significantly increase appropriations for the Reforestation, Nursery, and Genetics Resources Program (RNGR) within the Forest Service’s State and Private Forestry deputy area to provide support for reforestation workforce, seedling and technical assistance needs facing state and Tribal nation nurseries. RNGR is a vital but underfunded program that provides targeted technical assistance, primarily to state and Tribal nurseries; it needs to be expanded to at least \$10 million per year to meet a broader set of both technical and financial assistance needs facing state and Tribal nurseries and must complement and not detract from RTF investments made through the REPLANT Act supporting Federal lands and nurseries.

¹“National Forest System Reforestation Strategy: Growing and Nurturing Resilient Forests,” USDA Forest Service, FS-1198, July 2022.

Second, establish a new competitive grant funding opportunity for reforestation research, nursery, seed collection/storage and workforce needs through state agricultural and forestry experiment stations, colleges and universities, research organizations and private organizations. Such a program could be housed within the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and help land grant universities and colleges of forestry lead consortiums of public and private partners to advance reforestation applied research, assessment and planning needs and contribute solutions to barriers in seed collection, workforce and infrastructure for scaling our reforestation supply chains. Investment in the best new ideas and efforts fueled by this competitive program would yield exponential returns to address many of the needs outlined above.

Third, establish nimble loan and loan guarantee financing for nurseries serving public, private and urban reforestation and recovery needs. Financing to expand and build new nursery capacity remains a bottleneck in the supply chain that constrains the scope and scale of reforestation initiatives nationwide. Financing in the form of low-cost loans and loan guarantees, along the lines of the provisions in Section 113 of H.R. 2639 in the 117th Congress, would help state, private and Tribal nurseries develop, expand and improve quality control measures in response to forecasted demand, rather than simply current contracted supply needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today on behalf of American Forests. We look forward to partnering with the Subcommittee on all facets of your forestry agenda for this farm bill and are grateful for all the work you will dedicate on behalf of the nation's forests, the communities in your districts, and Americans everywhere over the coming months.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Holmes, for your testimony and your thoughts on that.

So at this point, Members' questions will be taken in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority and in order of arrival for those who have joined us after the hearing has convened. You will be recognized for 5 minutes each in order to allow as much question time as possible.

Therefore, I will recognize myself for 5 minutes, but I am going to immediately defer to the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Kelly, so that he can be in two places at once.

Mr. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And we have competing interests, and this was the most important hearing I had today, on forestry. Mississippi has a huge forest.

The pace and scale of forest management must be increased on millions of acres of forest lands. Despite the need to increase forest management, the Biden Administration is creating new barriers for land managers. Commissioner Brandt, you stated in your testimony that Federal regulations drastically reduced timber harvests within the National Forest System. Can you elaborate on these comments, please?

Mr. BRANDT. Well, as the witness to my left talked about access, access is probably one of the largest issues dealing with timber management. You can't afford to helicopter log everything, so you need to build roads. And roads, besides accessing the timber, also assist in fighting fire. One of the things right now in firefighting is that we are trying to do it completely by air again, and that is really expensive and not efficient. So I would say the regulations on road restrictions is huge.

Mr. KELLY. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time to you.

The CHAIRMAN. Reclaiming my time. Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Brandt, the forestry title has a clear impact on the timber community in Idaho County. Ranchers are also impacted by the way forestry programs are implemented. Over the last years, we

have seen what happens if Federal policies to reduce hazardous fuels are incomplete or not effective. We know it is important to reduce the density of standing timber and prevent accumulation of fire fuels on the ground in order to have an effective strategy. Can you talk about how Idaho has implemented grazing as a land management tool, particularly as a complement to the forestry work in your county in your experience?

Mr. BRANDT. It is good to be popular on these questions. I would say that Idaho generally has a long track record of supporting grazing on public lands and to affect the grass element of the fires. However, because of access and the fire component, as well as in 1995 we were affected by the Federal Government with the Canadian gray wolf, and that poses a huge issue for grazers, who stick their cattle out in the forest hinterlands and have these wolves chase cattle all over the place. Besides depredation, it affects, of course, the health of the cattle and it pushes them off the grazing allotments in which then, of course, the grazer gets in trouble because his cattle aren't where they are supposed to be. And so the grazing component is a great tool, and I would say that it gets used a lot more in southwest Idaho because of the flatter terrain and less wolves.

But again, going back to the fire, if a fire breaks out, those cattlemen have to go in immediately and collect all those cows and get them out of harm's way, and that is not exactly easy to do.

The CHAIRMAN. All right, thank you for that. Let's go to Mr. Imbergamo on—Forest Service has only approved eight fuel break projects using the categorical exclusions, the CEs, which were enacted in November of 2021, covering fuels reduction on less than 13,000 acres. I mentioned earlier Forest Service oversees 193 million acres, and their 10 year plan was to go after 20 million on their own lands. So the Forest Service has yet to issue guidance on National Forest System units on how to use emergency action authority created in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. In your view, is this a matter of lack of funding, manpower, or something else? And what additional authorities or allocations can Congress provide to increase the pace and scale—probably in the authorities, I would imagine—to increase the pace and scale of management of Forest Service land. So again, is it lack of funding, manpower, or other?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. I am hard pressed to say, Mr. Chairman. Clearly, the Congress has provided substantial resources, about \$800 million in the first 2022 supplemental and then about \$5 billion in the Infrastructure Act, and then about \$1.5 billion in the Inflation Reduction Act. So resources doesn't seem to be the issue.

In terms of the emergency authorities in particular, the Administration, USDA began consultation with Tribes on that only about 45 days ago, and that was enacted in November of 2021. To me, it doesn't impart a sense of urgency to begin working on an emergency authority after about 14 months of having it.

So in terms of improving response, I think scaling up the number of acres they can treat under some of the categorical exclusions, but I think also just generally oversight of what is going on within the agency.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. All right. We have burned my 5 minutes, so I will turn to our Ranking Member, Ms. Salinas, for 5 minutes.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Holmes—and thank you to all the panelists for being here today—your written testimony mentioned the wildfire funding fix secured in the 2018 omnibus, and it was a great step towards stabilizing the budget on non-fire programs within the U.S. Forest Service. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act increased grant opportunities, particularly for partners as of January of this year, and in particular for Oregonians who have submitted a total of \$63.4 million in Federal grant requests to protect our forests and communities. However, we often hit these stopping points due to difficulties in navigating the agency or inadequate agency resources. How will the funding provided in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act increase agency capacity to better work with partners like yours?

Mr. HOLMES. Thank you, Ranking Member Salinas. The question is a great one. And I would frame that the contribution of the new funding as game-changing. As you know, and as you stated, prior to the 2018 fix in funding, there was a constant triage around the potential for fire borrowing to disrupt programs in any given year. Since that fix, there hasn't been significant increases until the bipartisan infrastructure law and now the Inflation Reduction Act. And that surge in funding offers the opportunity for organizations like American Forests to potentially move beyond a project-by-project partnership approach to one that is far more programmatic and efficient. It allows us to scale up our programs of work to higher staffing. As a nonprofit organization, we need that predictability of multiyear funding. It also allows the Forest Service to bring on the types of contracting and partnership agreement support it needs to work more effectively with partners.

I would say that the Forest Service has made progress under the 10 year strategy that they have announced to prioritize resources, to streamline partnerships, grants and agreements, to develop more of these large-scale partnership agreements that they are calling Keystone agreements. But there are opportunities for that work to be expanded, and I think all of the witnesses here today have mentioned those opportunities spanning Tribal government, local government, state government, the private-sector and industry and nonprofit partners. Unleashing those partnerships right now at a time where capacity is one of the greatest limiting factors and accomplishing our work will be critical to everyone's collective success.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. And this question is for Ms. Shultzabarger. Your testimony mentions a need to support reforestation through support of the U.S. Forest Service Reforestation Nurseries and Genetic Resources program. Can you speak to the work that is being done to support seed orchards, particularly in states like my own, Oregon, and how Good Neighbor agreements are important for making that work really effective?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, great. Absolutely. So in the same ways that state agencies can support the Forest Service on say timber management or wildfire risk reduction or stream restoration, refor-

estation through the GNA, states can also lend their capacity and expertise to help with nurseries and seed orchards. So other states have been moving forward with GNA projects with National Forests and state seed orchards. And there are many, many opportunities for us to work together in building our nurseries and seed orchards together. So there is success already in place with other projects, and I think there is great opportunity for this to occur with orchards and nurseries as well.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. And then just hopefully a quick follow-up. It was recently reported that the State of Washington may actually need to utilize Oregon nurseries to meet their reforestation needs. And the Bipartisan Policy Center has separately identified a gap that the nation's nurseries are not really equipped to meet those skyrocketing demand for seedlings. Should we be looking at financing mechanisms like loans and loan guarantees through U.S. Forest Service to support our nation's nurseries?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, absolutely. And, my fellow witnesses also talked about the need for being able to fund those restoration and nursery opportunities. We have failing infrastructure in our nurseries. We have great needs for capacity for seed orchards and also for the staffing to be able to do so. So putting funding towards the nurseries would be very helpful.

Ms. SALINAS. And I have been hearing directly from my nurseries on that, so thank you.

I will yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Salinas.

We will now turn to our colleague from Alabama, Mr. Moore.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Imbergamo, is that how you say it?

Imbergamo, okay, got you. Thank you for your testimony this morning. As you are aware, the farm bill creates a robust framework for all jurisdictions in managing forest. In my home State of Alabama, upwards of 93 percent of our state's forests are privately owned. Can you talk a little bit about an active role as far as public-private partnerships and how that plays out in the management of these private forests?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Well, sure. I always say I don't represent the entire forest products industry, just those lucky enough to try to do business with the Forest Service. So that is the perspective I come at it from. My member companies across the country, hardly any of them solely rely on the Forest Service. Probably those in the Dakotas are the most reliant and those in Idaho as well.

I think the reality is, if we don't have the National Forest well managed, that impacts the ability of private landowners to manage their forests. We are a highly cyclical industry. We are entering a bit of a downturn right at the moment. I always say my members enjoyed a brief bout of profitability the last couple of years. And when we go into these down periods, the Forest Service still manages their land. They are not economically motivated. That helps keep sawmills open and keep wood-consuming facilities in place. And if we can have the National Forest—they manage for a variety of reasons. They create habitat, they want to reduce fuel loads, that sort of thing, that helps keep the wood infrastructure existent and viable so that when we do have a return to more robust prices, pri-

vate landowners have outlets for those wood products. So I would say that the system works in concert, not necessarily with—particularly in the Southeast, it is rather independent.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you.

Ms. Shultzabarger, your testimony states that you would like to see a post-disaster forest landowner assistance program bolstered. In Alabama, this is particularly important to our foresters. I am an original cosponsor of Reps. Carter and Sewell's Disaster Reforestation Act of 2023 (H.R. 655). Aside from fair post-disaster tax treatment for private forest owners, what technical assistance can be provided to restore the forest to their pre-disaster conditions?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Sure. There is a need to move quickly in these situations and get the assistance to the landowners, and also with those that are managing both the agricultural side of things and the forestry side of things. So often FSA lacks that technical forestry expertise. And as I said in my comments earlier today, state forestry agencies have those technical foresters on staff that can help provide that technical assistance and help provide that quick response needed in these situations. And so I think there are opportunities for FSA to lean on state forestry agencies for that technical assistance and outreach to landowners to get them what they need to get ready.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, and we deal with so many hurricanes. I can remember Hurricane Michael came through, and it looked like you had just dropped a giant lawnmower on all of the southeast part of the state in Georgia. So very often, I think it is important that we respond pretty quick in this post-disaster, especially in our part of the world. We lost so much timberland. So thank you.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you to the gentleman.

We will now turn to Ms. Gluesenkamp Perez from Washington for 5 minutes.

Ms. PEREZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Shultzabarger, you mentioned in your testimony the importance of Good Neighbor Authority, which right now is critical for our forests, especially Federal. If the Federal agencies aren't able to get boots on the ground, Good Neighbor Authority is critical to leverage state and local partners to get those important forest health projects completed.

But we also know there is important work to be done on non-Federal lands, which is why I am proud to be introducing a bill with Congressman Fulcher, the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act (H.R. 1450). This bill expands the Good Neighbor Authority to allow Tribes and counties like mine to reinvest funds they receive from Good Neighbor Authority timber sales into the restoration projects and expand the abilities of all partners to have a restoration performed on their lands, not just Federal lands. This bill recognizes that Tribes and counties are on the frontlines of the challenges facing our Federal lands such as wildfire. And, those of us living in the WUI, living in these timber counties, we have a lot of incentive to get this work done. That is one of the reasons I think it is so important that we support this legislation.

In your testimony you speak about the importance of expanding it. Could you speak to what these changes would mean for our states, counties, and Tribes and the health of our forests broadly?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Sure. And, I mean, we all know in managing natural resources, we have to work at a landscape scale across boundaries, across ownerships, and it requires a collaborative approach. And so GNA has really worked for states and working with the Forest Service and getting good work on the ground, adding that capacity. And it works for states, and we feel that it could work for Tribes and counties, too. They just need those tools and those funds to go back to them to be able to do the same level of work that the states are doing. And this only adds that capacity and allows for further work within the national system and across that landscape of the GNA.

Ms. PEREZ. Thank you. I would also like to talk about some of the challenges our resource-heavy counties face as we think about how to manage their lands and support our local communities. Skamania County where I live in the southeast corner, my district is 80 percent Forest Service land. It is a lot of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Mr. Brandt, your comments about the economic restraints of Idaho County Government really resonated with me as counties in my district faced similar issues. I really know what it feels like too, these county governments feel like they are always coming with their hand out asking for something when they want to think about ways to ensure their long-term prosperity. From your perspective, Mr. Brandt, how can we help these resource-heavy counties generate a sustainable income? Like what existing Federal programs can and should be leveraged to ensure their long-term economic viability?

Mr. BRANDT. Well, right off the bat, that is just land management. Growing up in Idaho County, I can only literally remember one day that our valley was socked in with smoke back in the day. However, at that time, we had eight sawmills running and vibrant sawmills. Now we have one and we have weeks and weeks of being socked in with smoke. So the component of tourism goes down when you have a summer filled full of smoke. Nobody wants to be on the rivers. And so dealing with the fire issue is probably the number one aspect outside the actual timber harvest.

One of the issues right now in talking to Chief Moore, the Forest Service has money to attempt to increase harvest, but from that, they believe that an industry is going to come in and build a \$50 million facility, and that is just not going to happen unless the Federal Government can come up with some way of guaranteeing that fiber supply for 30+ years. Nobody is going to come in and spend that kind of money in anticipation that the government isn't going to change their mind and shut down timber harvest.

Ms. PEREZ. Thank you. I would like to touch briefly on the importance of workforce development within the timber and forestry sector. We saw so many of our biggest timber county losing their forestry programs in their high school levels. So in the last 30 seconds we have I just think it is important that we are thinking about building out a domestic workforce that can take on these jobs and enrich the local rural communities. Tourism is great, but we also need to focus on the natural resources we have.

Mr. Holmes, would have loved to hear more from you on this about how we can address these constraints in workforce development, but thank you for your work on that.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you for your questions on that for a colleague from Washington. I will turn to our colleague from Oregon, Mrs. Chavez-DeRemer for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMÉR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I apologize for not being here for the live testimony, but I did read the testimony that was submitted to us so I just have a few questions.

Ms. Shultzabarger, did I get that right?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Shultzabarger, yes.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMÉR. Thank you. Well, there was some technical assistance questions that were asked by my colleagues here, and so this might be a repeat for you, but can you tell me some examples of the technical assistance provided by the National Association of State Foresters to private landowners? And why is TA, technical assistance, so critical of a component to achieving state forest agencies' common mission of protecting America's forests? And have you identified any other opportunities for improvement in delivering the technical assistance specifically?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, absolutely. Knowing that most of the forests across the United States are privately owned and there is a lot of technical information regarding forest management, so you have restoration needs after a wildfire or needing to manage the forest to reduce the potential impacts of wildfire or the impacts from invasive species. So there are a lot of different ways that we connect with leaders to make them understand those issues that are potentially out there or how best to sustainably manage their forests moving forward. There are a lot of details and information that the technical assistance staff and foresters provide and make those connections within those to understand that there are opportunities and available funding or connections with consulting foresters to be able to best manage those lands that they have in their back 40 or the back 100 or 200.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMÉR. Thank you. Commissioner Brandt, you mentioned in your statement frivolous special interest lawsuits only serve to delay much-needed management of the National Forest System. You also suggested in your testimony that Federal regulations drastically reduced timber harvests within the National Forest System. So kind of as a follow-up to those, how does the Endangered Species Act affect your work on both the Federal and private lands? And are there any programs that are especially hard to implement because of ESA?

Mr. BRANDT. With regards to the programs, I can't really answer that directly. But with regards to ESA, right now, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, which has the biggest presence, I have six National Forests in my little county, and they have the heaviest presence. And they have right now three projects, two big ones that are tied up in lawsuits because of the ESA issues. And so that is the caveat. The Forest Service employees recognize that they need to manage the land, but whatever they do, there is a group out there that would rather it literally burn up naturally than have loggers go in there and actually treat the lands.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you.

And, Mr. Holmes, the Forest Service was allotted over \$10 billion from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. With that in mind, some of the testimony we have heard today noted that the Forest Service is challenged in hiring and retaining workers, and I am concerned that a large pool of money like that going to an underemployed agency could lead to lost dollars and irresponsible spending. How can Congress provide the proper oversight or this funding on how partners like you or your organization help the Forest Service implement these dollars and ensure they reach the communities that are desperately in need?

Mr. HOLMES. Thank you for that question. Our organization has been heavily involved in the workforce issue and believe that there are opportunities for cooperators such as nonprofits to play the role of essentially serving as the farm team for our Federal agency partners. It is hard to get folks and talent into many of the rural places where most of this work needs to occur. And organizations like ourselves can help develop new training, new pathways that bring people from their academic institutions and backgrounds into careers in this service and position them to effectively onboard into the Federal system. So we would love to see the agency taking more advantage of those opportunities around restoration work and rightfully agree that there is a significant need to bring a focus both to the acute needs around workforce but longer-term issues as well.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you to our colleague from Oregon. I will recognize myself once again for 5 full minutes this time. And indeed, we will have additional rounds of questions for those that would wish to stay or come on back.

All right. Ms. Shultzabarger, our states are on opposite ends of the country, but we both have—our home areas live the importance of proper forest management and our industry to our local economies of the timber industry. So the 2014 Farm Bill expanded the Good Neighbor Authority to all 50 states, and the 2018 Farm Bill expanded to counties and Tribes, as has been emphasized heavily on the panel here today. And we have stuff to fix on that with the ability to have the revenue, be more flexible to put it right back into the work that they are doing. So indeed that has our attention, and you have all done a really good job of underlining that today, so we will work hard on that in this upcoming farm bill to fix what was basically an oversight or a last minute, something on that, okay?

But please emphasize for us what other incentives can be provided to both public and private partners to continue and expand the work that is so greatly needed in the West, as well as in your region.

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Specific to GNA or just generally?

The CHAIRMAN. We hope to get the GNA fix done but expanding beyond that when we are talking about the pace and scale of forestry work that needs to be done, mostly on Federal land, but anything on your mind on the Federal incentives we can move in this direction.

Mr. BRANDT. Sure. I think when you think about increasing that pace and scale, obviously—and I had already mentioned the need for partnerships and being able to work at that large landscape collaborative scale across different ownerships and tools like GNA tools, like the Joint Chiefs grants, the tools like LSR really enable and support that landscape scale, which really we need to look at when you think about managing invasives or you are looking at restoring a landscape, being able to cross those boundaries and have flexible ways that we can get funds to partners, to counties, different state agencies and Federal to be able to be flexible in getting those funds out there. And so, GNA, Joint Chiefs, LSR, and I had also talked about that rural piece in the LSR language and really one of the—

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, once you drill down on that a little bit more in your opening comments, you were talking about that, the 50,000 and less and lower-population towns and how that has been a real impediment on WUI and everything. Please?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Right. And a lot of times, many of the issues that we have result around people in forests, right? That is how often invasives or pests and diseases are spread. And it is different across the U.S., I understand this, but in Pennsylvania, 99 percent of our wildfires are human-caused, and so we see an increase in wildfires in those communities, that 50,000 and above, and being able to target funds in those areas where we need to be connecting with people working to reduce that wildfire risk around those high-populated communities. It just really has made it difficult to make those connections where we really need to make those connections. So that that would be helpful.

The CHAIRMAN. On the larger ones. How does that work on the smaller ones?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. The smaller ones we are able to—funding is able to be put in those smaller areas, but in the larger areas, then those funds or that grant program cannot be utilized in that area.

The CHAIRMAN. So that is something we need to be looking at, too. Would we expand the number or raise the number? What would we do?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. We would essentially raise the number or remove that *rural* designation, so that would allow it to be in all community types. Trees are beneficial in many, many different ways or forest management in those, be it rural, community, or urban forest is really important. There is great opportunity.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Imbergamo, on a post-fire situation when we are getting into salvage and recovery, what can we do to fix the bogging down of that? I am short on time here, but we will come back later perhaps.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Yes. Sir, one of the things we could do is the agency gave itself a new authority called determination of NEPA adequacy, which enabled—it would enable them to use an already-decided NEPA document, and they can make the determination that that NEPA document adequately addresses the issues after a fire, and they can still do the project if only part of the project area is affected. Unfortunately, what we frequently see is the agency drops back, reinitiates NEPA, possibly reinitiates ESA consulta-

tion. And, wood has an expiration date on it. Depending on where you are, it is longer or shorter depending on if you are in an arid climate or a humid climate.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. But using that authority more aggressively, and frankly, having a plan before the disturbance. We know what kind of disturbances are affecting the National Forests, fire in the West, hurricanes in the Southeast, wind events in the Northeast and having a plan on what to do on general forest acres and implementing it immediately would help address reforestation and capture more value.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you. My time has passed. Ranking Member Salinas, do you have additional—

Ms. SALINAS. I do. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for allowing us additional time.

Mr. Brandt, in your testimony, you mentioned the need to reauthorize both the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, and we have discussed this a lot here. And you mentioned needing stronger partnerships to ensure that these programs are successful. From your experience with the Clearwater Basin Collaborative, what opportunities do you think there are for stronger partnerships?

Mr. BRANDT. Well, number one, if the counties were able to gain the GNA receipts aspect to put back into the ground, I mean, you are dealing with small counties—we don't have a forester. We have a fire mitigation person. But we are limited. Our noxious weed department has two employees. I mean, that is really the component that I see as the largest gain is if we can have receipts to go back to the ground, we can hire people. I don't have to take 6 to 9 months to do a background check like the Forest Service does. I can hire a forester tomorrow and put him out on the ground the next day. And same with noxious weeds or any employee. So again, funding components are probably the number one aspect of beyond their agreements.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. And, Oregon is fortunate. We received nearly \$11.7 million last April for five of these projects, and I think our communities are really excited about it. And this may be the same question, just asked in a different way. But what is, in your opinion, needed to maximize collaboratives like these, and what changes should be made to the program?

Mr. BRANDT. I think they have pretty—I have covered as best I can.

Ms. SALINAS. Yes.

Mr. BRANDT. Again, it gets into funding aspects, and anything that could, again, limit the lawsuits that that come about. They attempted—Congress, in putting together the collaborative efforts, attempted to take that away. But again, there are groups out there that do not want the Forest Service to manage the land. They want it to be natural. And they are just sitting back, waiting for the opportunity to sue to tie up a project.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you.

And then Mr. Imbergamo, in your opinion, does the U.S. Forest Service have capacity issues right now? And do you believe current staffing issues contribute to those capacity issues?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Yes, they do have staffing issues now. They lost over 8,000 silviculturists and engineers in the early 2000s. They had about 8,000 retirements coming at them, and they largely did not restaff in those positions. And they are down quite a number of positions. I would say that my industry is also down quite a number of positions in the mills that have closed and also in the mills that have remained open. We have done things like automate and contract for things. That is definitely a way that they could increase their capacity.

The other way that they could increase their capacity would be to reduce the planning time, the lead time required to get a project on the ground. And that would be through more aggressive use of the expedited authorities that Congress has already passed.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. And one follow-up question. Will the funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act help address the 39 percent drop in forest management staff that was brought about by fire borrowing?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Yes, both Inflation Reduction and the Infrastructure Acts should provide some ability to make up for some of those things. The one thing about both of those laws is they were enacted without much regard for the agency's budget structure, and so that might be a worthwhile conversation with the agency is how to better align those pots of money with the new budget structure which, quite frankly, within the agency is poorly understood.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you so much, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Our Committee Chairman has rejoined us, and I will recognize him for 5 minutes for any questions he has.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much. My apologies for having to step out here with—but I am glad to be back, and I thank you all and your written testimonies. So I have a couple questions. Invasive insects and plant species have had devastating effects on forest health and need to be treated through active management, I would argue, using landscape approach like we try to do with addressing preventing wildfires. We have seen this devastation in Pennsylvania with pests such as the spotted lantern fly, the gypsy moth, and the current plant species of the day, which is a glossy buckthorn.

Director Shultzabarger, can you speak to the challenges that we have seen in Pennsylvania with invasive species? And how can Congress assist the Forest Service and forest industry to work with state forestry agencies, forest managers, and other partners to address these challenges?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, it seems that our crisis in the East is definitely invasive species, and glossy buckthorn is the new one. And if you are not aware, it is a bush that essentially changes the character, no longer forest, and is quite impactful. But the ability for organizations, be it Federal, state, county to be able to—or non-profits and landowners to be able to work together at a landscape scale is probably the most critical way to make change.

In Pennsylvania around the Allegheny National Forest, we have the Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative, which has been an extremely successful group and tool in getting information out there about what is going on, how to address and treat some of these spe-

cies and help bring together potential funding streams and share ways that we can make an impact to these resources at a larger scale because if everybody is doing one piece here and there, we are really not going to address the issue of the spreading invasive species. So the ability to get these funds like GNA, Joint Chiefs, LSR, and there is cooperative weed management areas, to be able to have funding go there to provide that technical assistance to prioritize funding and really target those treatments at a landscape scale to help address an issue is probably the most critical piece is having everybody involved.

Mr. THOMPSON. Yes, absolutely. It really is an all-hands-on-deck, right?

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Yes, it is.

Mr. THOMPSON. And reducing the barriers to that and, again, I appreciate with your testimony that you had provided. I was trying to anticipate unintended consequences and provide clarity so that as folks in the Executive Branch, with Forest Service are executing exactly what the intent of Congress was. And believe it or not, that doesn't always happen. So that is where the oversight is so important that we stay at the table.

Mr. Imbergamo, good to see you. Are you familiar with the *Cottonwood* case?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Yes, sir.

Mr. THOMPSON. Excellent. Can you tell us what the status of this precedent is?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. So *Cottonwood* was a case in Montana, possibly Idaho, sorry. And the gist of it is—the result is that the Forest Service has to go and consult with Fish and Wildlife Service on the underlying forest plan even if Fish and Wildlife Service has no concerns about the project, they have no take or jeopardy concerns for the listed species. This has made the Forest Service go back and consult on forest plans that are old enough to drive, some of which were adopted in the 1980s. In fact, the injunction that was in place in New Mexico in Mr. Vasquez's district was on a plan that was adopted in 1989. And that enjoined all activity for about 13 months, and that area was the area that the Hermits Peak Fire burned.

The Obama Administration appealed that to the Supreme Court, and Congress provided a sort of stay of execution in the 2018 omnibus bill that actually expires at the end of this month, and that fix only partially addressed the precedent. We actually right now have in Region 1, which is where Idaho is, we have about 300 million feet enjoined in *Cottonwood* cases. That is enough to frame about 26,000 houses.

Mr. THOMPSON. That is a lot of fuel for wildfires, which are devastating, as we know, the forest health, human health, the economy. And so I am looking forward to working with the Chairman and the Ranking Member as we put together this forestry title in the farm bill so that we can really advance and I think build on the successes that we had in 2014 and 2018 for the forestry title.

So thank you, and my time has expired.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We will get after that. So I feel we can kind of keep going here a little bit, and we have, yes, so we haven't taken that much time yet.

So, Commissioner Brandt, in your statement, you talked about frivolous special interest lawsuits that only serve to delay much-needed management of the forest system. Would you elaborate on that a little bit? Because I certainly feel it in my area in northern California, especially post-fire, but this is important pre-fire, too, on being able to do the commonsense management.

Mr. BRANDT. Yes, sir. And I turn to my other witnesses with regards to—and the term skips my mind, but when individuals sue and then they are reimbursed expenses—

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Equal Access to Justice (Pub. L. 96–481).

Mr. BRANDT. Equal Access to Justice I think is a huge component that fuels that fire if you will. And if there could be something done with that, I think that would assist the agency in a huge way.

The CHAIRMAN. Elaborate a little more on that, please.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. If somebody sues the Forest Service and wins, the Forest Service basically writes the suing entity a check.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. And they tend to get a little gun shy about trying to step out and do projects, it seems, so—

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Yes, that that is true, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. So the Federal regulations have reduced timber harvests within the forest system. What regulations do we need to be looking at, whether it is part of the farm bill or outside of that, I mean, we are not trying to get away with murder here. We are behind by 50 years. Go ahead.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Absolutely. Again, I am lifelong resident of the Clearwater Valley. My house overlooks the confluence of the South Fork into the main stem. It is where I live, I play. It is where I am going to retire. I am not trying to overharvest somebody else's backyard. This is my home, and it is important to me. And the dynamic of—I sort of lost track there. The dynamic of what we want to get done on the ground is complicated by the Forest Service's processes. I mean, the Forest Service never gets rid of any of their internal process. They just keep stacking on top. And that gets back to just their inability to hire employees where it takes 9 months to just do a background check. You can get a fully automatic machine gun, and it takes less to do a background check there. But just to get employed by a Federal agency like the Forest Service, it is just—

The CHAIRMAN. Back to the process I think several on the panel have talked about with workforce here, with the frustration of getting the workforce filled up, whether it was within the agency or even out there in the private-sector, so we have to incentivize that somehow. And to your issue, you talked about, Mr. Brandt, earlier, too, with 83 percent of the land in your county in Idaho is federally owned, so we get into the PILT, payment in lieu of taxes.

Mr. BRANDT. SRS.

The CHAIRMAN. What we hope to keep fronting, I guess, or something, and the SRS, Secure Rural Schools, which those folks, they came to my office here recently. It seems like a hat in hand every year or every at least extension of keeping the backfill from the loss of the industry.

Now anybody on the panel wish to touch on the PILT or especially the SRS?

Mr. BRANDT. Well, I'll jump out first. Again, going back to the days when I was in school, our school system was the wealthiest school system in the state. Now we are one of the poorest. Again, because we were doing regular timber harvest projects, we would reap 25 percent of the stumpage fee. And now that we have gone away from really logging but going more into regular stewardship instead of standard timber harvest, we don't get that—that 25 percent is not set back for the counties, for the schools and roads.

The CHAIRMAN. So that is an anomaly, too, with the stewardship where the Secure Rural Schools used to receive the timber receipts for schools and roads within counties. That money has bypassed that.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. Yes, sir, it has. And I just note that, right now, about 25 percent of the Forest Service sale program goes out of stewardship contracts, so those do not generate receipts for the counties in California. It is north of 35 or 38 percent.

The CHAIRMAN. And that also needs to be repaired in the Good Neighbor Authority where the dollars that would come from that work are not staying local either to help replace the Secure Rural Schools funding that we have to come hat in hand to D.C. for, right?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. I believe that is correct, sir, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, okay.

Mr. BRANDT. I just note that the component of stewardship funding that the agency gets, it is very specific on how the agency can use it. It is to go to the ground and to treat the ground, not necessarily a payment to the county schools and infrastructure.

The CHAIRMAN. Right. Okay. Well, maybe that is not so bad. All right.

I will recognize Ranking Member Salinas, and we will probably call it a day after that, okay?

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, Mr. Holmes, you can bring us home here. You mentioned the need to authorize and appropriate more funding for the Reforestation Nursery and Genetic Resources Program. How would this benefit Federal lands?

Mr. HOLMES. Thank you for the question. The RNGR program supports primarily technical and financial assistance for state and Tribal nurseries, and in that regard, complements a lot of the work that happens on our Federal lands and Federal nurseries. As you know, many of the impacts from insect and disease wildfire know no boundary, and so we view the RNGR investment as an important complementary investment to what Congress has authorized through the REPLANT Act moving forward.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. And I do have a follow-up. So your second recommendation is to establish a competitive grant funding opportunity for reforestation research, nursery and seed collection, seed storage, and workforce needs. Why is it important that this is done in partnership with state agricultural and forestry research stations, colleges and universities, and other researchers?

Mr. HOLMES. Right now, our conventional practices for reforestation, as I mentioned during my testimony, are really based on these rather antiquated field trials we did many years ago with certain spacings. The opportunities to go back in to do thinning for

regrowth, to do treatments of herbicide or other things to control competing vegetation. The realities we are facing in a post-fire context in particular, but also in response to these other threats, require completely rethinking those practices. They also require rethinking what seed and genetic sources are going to be the most productive over the long haul in those regions. And then we also have to integrate future fuels treatments and think about what the future condition of fuels is on the forest as where we are reestablishing stand structures.

There is currently no funding to do that kind of applied work and research and in addition to support the needed monitoring. Our land-grant universities, our agricultural and forestry experiment stations could be at the tip of the spear of supporting a lot of the work and indeed many are and I think could play an exciting convening role, bringing public-sector, private-sector partners together around that set of problems.

Ms. SALINAS. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Salinas.

I think at this point, I would like to offer all of our panelists 60 seconds each to close with any compelling thoughts we have missed here today. So let's start on the left with Ms. Shultzabarger again.

Ms. SHULTZABARGER. Oh, okay, rapid fire compelling thought. Yes, essentially what we have talked about is there is we have some good starts in the farm bill and some areas that we could provide some clarity to be able to really provide those on-the-ground results through GNA or LSR. And we just really appreciate the time and listening to the different opportunities, and we are happy to talk further about any of these opportunities to make some effective changes to really broaden our landscape scale approach, so thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you again for your testimony and your appearance today, Ms. Shultzabarger.

Mr. Brandt?

Mr. BRANDT. Well, I just thank the Committee. And this is exciting to have this opportunity and have the possibility of fixing a potentially broke system, so I look forward to moving forward with the farm bill and hopefully finding a solution to not have the counties coming back with hat in hand asking for PILT payments and SRS payments.

The CHAIRMAN. All right. Thank you. We look forward to any communications you would like to send to us to help us in shaping the farm bill policy. Thank you, Mr. Brandt, for your time and appearance here today.

Mr. Imbergamo?

Mr. IMBERGAMO. So in the summer of 2014 I had lunch in Greenville in your district. And it is my understanding that that town is no longer there, that it was burned to the ground by that fire.

The CHAIRMAN. Seventy-five percent of the buildings are not there. They are chipping away, coming back. They have a great spirit there, so yes, sir.

Mr. IMBERGAMO. And I think that if I can try to be compelling, the compelling thought is we have to start acting year-round like that is the crisis that we are facing. We cannot afford to have summers where we burn an entire National Forest in one summer.

That is what we have experienced in 2020 and 2021. Thankfully, 2022 was a bit of a reprieve, but the conditions that would allow that to happen are present on the landscape. And we need to start acting like a change in paradigm is sincere and is happening year-round, not just when—there is no trouble mobilizing resources when there is a large fire on the horizon. We just have to realize that fire is always on the horizon even when we cannot see the smoke plume.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate it. Thank you for that.

Mr. Holmes?

Mr. HOLMES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member. We very much appreciate the discussion today, as well as, again, want to reiterate our thanks to you for the focus you are bringing on our field as part of this Subcommittee's work.

One area we didn't touch on today is the importance of forestry that spans multiple other titles of the farm bill, notably, research, conservation, and rural development. I just want to highlight that that integration is really valuable to our industry and our partnerships. And I also want to offer again that our organization is eager to be a resource, a pragmatic voice as part of this farm bill reauthorization for you and your staff, so thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Holmes.

Ranking Member Salinas, do you have any closing statement or thoughts?

Ms. SALINAS. Yes, just quickly, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses today for your travel and your time. You have provided great insight and expertise on forestry provisions from the 2018 Farm Bill and possible areas where we can make some positive changes, and I am looking forward to that work. Your views will essentially help guide us to reduce the risk posed by catastrophic wildfire, pests, and disease and promote the creation of jobs and rural opportunity and particularly in my district. So I am really excited to figure out what the restoration economy really looks like moving forward.

And I would like to thank the Chairman, Chairman LaMalfa, for organizing this kickoff hearing for the Forestry Subcommittee, and I look forward to more hearings and events as we work towards that 2023 Farm Bill. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Salinas.

I want to thank our staff, our teams on each side for really making it happen and organization of today's hearing. I look forward to doing a lot more of this. I think we indeed have to have a lot more discussion and action to help our nation's forests. As my constituents when I go see them, they are just tired of being under the gun of fire danger. I am tired of seeing my towns being threatened and disappearing in a ball of fire, loss of life. As mentioned, 85 lives lost in that large fire in Paradise. We have to look at some of the issues that need to be truly reformed, not to skirt the laws that are on the books but to make them modernized, make them work for us, the NEPA issue, whether it is pre-fire work or post-fire. It needs to be brought into line so that it actually is practical for the people doing good things on the ground.

Endangered Species Act, we need to look and see is that really working well to recover species for the offset of what it costs in

time and effort to do projects that need to be done. There are lawsuits, as was mentioned, as well. It seems it is more a way to just block the good work that needs to be done and put money in the pockets of those that have nothing to do with the industry or the communities that rely on the product. Why is the United States the number two importer of wood of any country in the world when we have so much in our own backyard?

As I kind of heard mentioned at the end, we need to look at this with urgency. We do have an emergency situation. We did dodge a bullet a lot in 2022 with the massive fires we saw in 2021 and 2020 and 2019 and 2018 and going back into, a little farther back in some of the North Bay Area, my colleagues like Mr. Thompson and others have had to deal with over there.

We have to treat this with great urgency, and I don't always see that in the pace and scale with which some Representatives or agencies move. So, I mean, my goal with the immediate issue of fire danger is that, let's get these fires put out before the fire has a name and before there is a T-shirt vendor onsite with the name of that fire and yet another graphic for us. We can do a lot more of this in time, okay?

So we have much to do. I look forward to more of these hearings and bringing a broader scope of folks into place to look at all the aspects, do something that is fair, something that is right but at the end of the day very productive.

So with that, thanks again to our panelists. We do appreciate your time and effort to be here and your testimony and look forward to communicating with you going forward. Thanks to our Ranking Member for her patience and time as I am really, really into this and want to see some of this stuff happen, so thanks so much, and God bless you.

And this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:39 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUBMITTED LETTER BY JACK WALDORF, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

March 8, 2023

Hon. DOUG LAMALFA,
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Forestry,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.;

Hon. ANDREA SALINAS,
Ranking Minority Member,
Subcommittee on Forestry,
House Committee on Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman LaMalfa and Ranking Member Salinas:

With respect to the Subcommittee's March 8 hearing, "A Review of Title VIII: Forestry Stakeholder Perspectives," attached please find two Western Governors' Association policy resolutions:

- WGA Policy Resolution 2021–03, *National Forest and Rangeland Management*; and
- WGA Policy Resolution 2023–01, *Working Lands, Working Communities*.

These policy resolutions convey Western Governors' collective, bipartisan policy on cross-boundary forest management, wildfire risk reduction, timber market development and other forestry topics. I request that you include this document in the official record of the hearing, as these resolutions articulate specific policy recommendations germane to Title VIII of the 2023 Farm Bill.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and your consideration of this request. Please contact me if you have any questions or require further information.
Sincerely,



JACK WALDORF,
Executive Director.

ATTACHMENT 1

Policy Resolution 2021–03, National Forest and Rangeland Management

A. Background

1. The American West encompasses a huge landmass representing 2.4 million square miles, or over $\frac{2}{3}$ of the entire country. Over 116 million people live in these states and they reside in large, densely populated cities, smaller cities and towns, and in rural areas.
2. Western communities share a unique relationship with natural resources. Communities in the West depend upon healthy forests and rangelands for jobs, recreation, and quality of life. Conversely, effective natural resource management is only possible if rural and resource-dependent communities are healthy, vibrant, and prosperous.
3. There are approximately 346 million acres of timber land in the West, of which 104 million acres are privately owned. In the United States, rangelands comprise about 31 percent of the total land area, approximately 761 million acres, which occur mostly in the West.
4. A high proportion of western lands are managed by the Federal Government. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), manages over 168 million acres of forests, rangelands, and grasslands through the National Forest System (NFS). Approximately 11 percent of all western lands are in the NFS. Western states include more than 75 percent of our National Forest and grassland system.
5. Department of the Interior (DOI) agencies, through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), manage a substantial portion of the West's forests and rangelands. The BLM manages over 245 million acres in the West, of which 155 million acres are managed for livestock grazing.
6. Healthy forests and rangelands provide a number of important ecosystem services and are a vital component of western ecosystems. In addition to providing food, fuel and fiber, forests and rangelands clean the air, filter water supplies, control floods and erosion, sustain biodiversity and genetic re-

sources, and provide opportunities for recreation, education, and cultural enrichment. Properly managed forests and rangelands can sequester greenhouse gases.

7. National Forests and Rangelands are economic drivers in western states. These public lands serve as critical economic engines and support local economic activities including grazing, wood products, mining, and recreation.
8. Public and private forest managers require forest products infrastructure to achieve community vitality and land management goals, including ecological restoration objectives and healthy and resilient forests.
9. Invasive species have damaged many of the forests and rangelands throughout the West and continue to be a threat to the West's working landscapes. Plant pests, such as the emerald ash borer, can cause significant environmental, economic, and human health impacts to western forests by destroying urban, suburban, and wildland canopy covers and imperiling the species that depend upon them. Invasive annual grasses, such as cheatgrass, medusahead and ventenata, pose a major threat to western rangelands by increasing the risk of wildfire, outcompeting native grasses, and diminishing soil and water quality. Invasive species management is an essential component of effective forest, rangeland and wildfire management.
10. In recent decades, the number, severity and overall size of wildfires has increased across much of the U.S. In that time, wildfire seasons have become longer and more intense. In areas that once experienced a 4 month fire season, fire seasons may now last 6 to 8 months. Many longstanding practices of the western wildland fire service, including reliance on "1039 seasonal" and permanent subject to furlough staff, were developed in an era with shorter, less intense fire seasons.
11. The USFS operates five regional research stations that work on a range of biological, physical and social science fields to promote sustainable management of the nation's forests and rangelands.
12. States have a particular interest in improving the active management of Federal forest lands. State governments have trust authority over water, wildlife and forest resources, along with primary authority and expertise to protect community health and safety. Poorly managed forests can have significant and broad impacts on the landscapes and communities of the West, including negative impacts to air quality and public health, degradation of rivers and streams and associated water quality (including drinking water), reduced forage for domestic livestock, wildlife diseases, impaired habitats and water for wildlife and fish, and the loss of forest products and associated jobs.
13. Relative to decades past and other forest landowners, forest managers today operate under a constrained decision space as they work to address contemporary issues such as climate change, invasive pests and diseases, habitat diversity, fuel build-ups and fire risk, fish passage barriers, unmaintained roads, and legacy impacts. Adding to this challenge are concerns about the economic and social vitality of rural communities that experience effects from reduced timber supply and compromised forest health. Displaced workers, declines in school enrollment, aging demographics, property loss, business closures, and revenue effects due to wildfire and high unemployment are not uncommon to these communities.
14. Due to the current USFS funding model, many of the legacy roads and water crossing structures are not being maintained, leading to washouts, mass wasting, and sedimentation of salmonid spawning habitat. Many culverts and bridges installed over the past few decades do not meet current fish passage criteria and are past their design life and now failing. This lack of maintenance has resulted in a significant increase in the number of fish passage barriers, which is limiting fish access to important spawning and rearing habitat.
15. States are managers as well, and many western states own extensive public land holdings that require forest products infrastructure to achieve community vitality and land management goals, including ecological restoration objectives and healthy and resilient forests.
16. The USFS business model has historically been based on a combination of Federal appropriations that were supplemented with revenue from resource sales and fees. Until the early 1990s, the USFS was a net contributor to the Federal treasury. Over the past 20 years, timber sales have dramatically declined.

17. In addition, the last decade has seen several large, very expensive wildfires, which have increased USFS wildfire suppression costs from 13 percent of the agency's FY 1991 budget to nearly 50 percent over the last several fiscal years. Consequently, under the current agency budgeting framework, forest management, hazardous fuels reduction, habitat improvement, road maintenance, road abandonment, fish passage barrier removals, and outdoor recreation programs have been negatively affected across National Forests and DOI lands.
18. An April 2015 USFS study, the "Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program 5 Year Report, FY 2010–2014," found that the past century of wildfire suppression and legacy management practices have contributed to forests being overstocked and primed for larger and more intense blazes, and that changes in land use and increasing social pressures make it difficult for the agency to let fire play its natural role of clearing the forest understory in certain forest types. Active forest management has historically played a pivotal role in the growth and mortality cycle of forests to manage fuel loading, which in turn can reduce fire-fighting costs and improve habitat resilience. Today, the USFS estimates that roughly 90,625² miles—an area larger than Utah—is at high or very high risk of severe wildfire and in need of treatment.
19. Insect infestation and disease have damaged many of the forests throughout the West. Severe drought conditions that are affecting western states, particularly California, have only exacerbated insect infestations and tree mortality. The effects go well beyond fire risk, and timber and fiber production are negatively affected, threatening the viability of the surviving forest product infrastructure. The significant decline in forest health has also created serious threats and challenges to watershed integrity, wildlife and fisheries habitats, recreational uses, businesses and tourism. All of these impacts present substantial challenges for forest-dependent communities across the West.
20. The dire forest conditions, unmet management needs, and the failure to provide lasting protections for some landscapes have brought diverse stakeholders together to find solutions. Community collaboration on forest health projects is robust in numerous places across the West, forging broad agreements among diverse stakeholders on projects that encompass fuels reduction, fiber production, habitat restoration, long-term protection for critical areas, and other community objectives. It is not uncommon to find mill owners, hunters and anglers, loggers, small business owners, conservationists, and local elected leaders working together around the table.
21. Collaborative planning and project implementation across National Forests and state and private forest lands on a larger scale allows for more diverse interests to address their particular needs for a landscape or a watershed. Taking a broad look at a landscape for planning purposes minimizes the challenges associated with managing lands for the benefit of a particular species or to address a specific need. Well-planned projects that are strategically placed across a landscape can result in a higher level of benefits than those that are more randomly or opportunistically placed. Processes associated with planning and implementing a project have become so time consuming and expensive for National Forests in particular that a disincentive often exists for their managers to proceed with management actions that are needed to attain desired ecological, social, and economic objectives.
22. The full benefits of collaborative efforts have not been realized on the land. Working constructively with collaborators requires resources to be productive and the Federal agencies often lack the necessary staff and funding.
23. Even when collaborative forest health projects enjoy broad support from diverse stakeholders and the agencies, administrative objections and litigation remain a too frequent outcome. One result is that community collaborative efforts become fatigued, and future opportunities are lost. Another outcome is that USFS restoration projects often go through exhaustive, time-consuming analysis, driving up costs and preventing the agency from scaling up management to meet the scope of the problem.
24. Today, the costs associated with planning and implementing a management project on National Forest lands are significantly more than those of the private sector. This cost, along with the time associated with drafting, analyzing, incorporating public involvement, and responding to appeals and/or litigation at the project level, lead many Federal managers to focus their limited staff, funds and time on projects with the least likelihood to be challenged. This ap-

- proach does not adequately address the larger socioeconomic and ecological needs of our National Forests and dependent communities.
25. Rangeland livestock operations were established decades ago, with many operations using forage on private, state and Federal lands. These family-based operations are important contributors to the customs, cultures and rural economies of the West.
 26. These operations also maintain open spaces and important habitat conditions (*e.g.*, year-round water sources) benefiting wildlife and recreation. Water rights, which are granted by the states for livestock grazing, will not benefit other uses if the agricultural operation ceases to maintain the beneficial use.
 27. Ranching operations that are responsibly managed provide valuable, active management of public lands including responsible grazing, maintenance of fences and other infrastructure, managing fuel loads, engaging in wildland fire monitoring and suppression, and cooperative management of noxious and invasive weeds.
 28. Federal land management agencies' actions in recent years have resulted in reductions or removal of domestic livestock from Federal lands.
 29. The USFS and BLM have permanently closed, left vacant without reissuing a grazing permit, and converted into forage reserves or "grass banks" some grazing allotments in recent years. In many instances, the allotments are technically available based upon forage availability, but permits are not issued for reasons including unmaintained rangeland improvements and uncompleted National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation by USFS or BLM.
 30. The USFS and BLM continue to receive pressure to close domestic sheep grazing allotments due to concerns about disease in bighorn sheep.
 31. Restrictions and closures can have negative economic impacts on ranchers and ranch dependent communities. Ranchers who have used the same Federal grazing allotments for generations may be abruptly forced to find new forage for their livestock when allotments are restricted or closed.
 32. Restrictions and temporary closures, when implemented to mitigate natural events like drought, wildfires and wildlife impacts, should be factored into ongoing, regular reviews and renewals of individual livestock allotments, individual livestock operators' use of the allotments or the total amount of grazing allotments available for ranchers.
 33. Inconsistent interpretation of operational policies across the West by local and regional Federal land managers compounds difficulties in managing livestock grazing on public lands. For example, Federal policy on acceptable types of supplemental feed, feed placement, and watering of livestock is interpreted without regard for localized rangeland conditions or the economics of local ranching operations. Failure to adapt policies to local conditions affects the ability of livestock grazing permittees to properly manage their livestock herds while achieving permit standards, goals, and objectives.
 34. USDA launched a Shared Stewardship Strategy in 2018 to work collaboratively with states to set priorities and co-manage risk across broad landscapes. Through the strategy, USDA coordinates with states to set priorities and increase the scope and scale of critical forest treatments that support communities and improve forest conditions. To date, fourteen Western states have entered into individual Shared Stewardship agreements with USDA to identify landscape-scale priorities and build capacity to improve forest conditions.
 35. In December 2018, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) and USDA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a framework to allow the USFS and WGA to work collaboratively to accomplish mutual goals, further common interests, and effectively respond to the increasing suite of challenges facing western landscapes. Under this agreement, WGA and USDA have pursued several collaborative campaigns to improve the management and restoration of western forests and rangelands.
 36. In 1908, when Congress created the NFS, it also passed the National Forest Revenue Act, which directs the USFS to share 25 percent of gross revenues with local governments. Then in 1976, Congress passed "Payments in Lieu of Taxes" (PILT) legislation providing Federal payments to local governments regardless of gross revenues that result from timber harvest and other forest management activities. After revenues from the sale of timber dropped substantially, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Self Determination

Act (SRS) in 2000, allowing counties to choose between a payment based on historical average and the 25 percent revenue share. SRS has expired several times, and PILT has been subject to funding uncertainty as well.

37. The 2014 Farm Bill provided the Forest Service with several new tools to accelerate forest restoration. Among them were Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), which allows USFS to enter into agreements with state forestry agencies to implement this critically important management work on National Forests when USFS is unable to do the work alone. Since GNA was first authorized, 32 states have initiated more than 130 GNA projects. In the 2018 Farm Bill, GNA authorities were expanded to allow Tribes and counties to enter into GNA agreements. The 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills also gave USFS and BLM Stewardship Contracting Authority (SCA), which allows communities, the private sector, and others to enter into long-term contracts to meet land management objectives. SCA allows forest products to be exchanged for ecological restoration services, which may include thinning and brush removal.
38. In the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement Act of 2009 (FLAME Act), Congress directed DOI and USDA to develop a national cohesive wildland fire management strategy to comprehensively address wildland fire management across all lands in the United States. The National Strategy explores four broad challenges: (1) managing vegetation and fuels; (2) protecting homes, communities, and other values at risk; (3) managing human-caused ignitions; and (4) effectively and efficiently responding to wildfire.
39. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 contained a new “fire borrowing fix,” a comprehensive remedy to budgeting for wildfire costs at DOI and USFS. The fix provides a new funding structure from Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 through FY 2027. Beginning in FY 2020, \$2.25 billion of new budget authority is available to USDA and the DOI. The budget authority increases by \$100 million each year, ending at \$2.95 billion in new budget authority by FY 2027. For the duration of the 8 year fix, the fire suppression account will be funded at the President’s FY 2015 Budget request—\$1.011 billion. If funding in the cap is used, the Secretary of Agriculture must submit a report to Congress documenting aspects of the fire season that led to the expenditures.
40. Several Federal programs assist state and local fire and land managers in their efforts to manage western lands. Among these are:
 - State Fire Assistance (SFA): The SFA program assists states and local fire departments in responding to wildland fires and conducting management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-Federal lands. The program also helps train and equip state first responders, who are the first to arrive at a wildfire (on any land ownership) 80 percent of the time. The program also assists communities in risk assessments and completing fire management planning projects.
 - Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) programs: The VFA program provides support to rural communities and is critical to ensuring adequate capacity to respond to wildfires, reducing the risk to communities, people, homes and property, and firefighters.
 - Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grants (HMAGs), administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, provide funding for eligible mitigation measures that reduce disaster losses. These grants include the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which support states, local communities, Tribes and territories as they undertake hazard mitigation projects, reducing the risks they face from disasters and natural hazards.

B. Governors’ Policy Statement

1. Western Governors support sound forest and rangeland management policies that maintain and promote ecologic, economic, and social balance and sustainability.
2. Western Governors support the creation of mechanisms to support and enhance cross-boundary collaborative work. To this end, Western Governors have established the Working Lands Roundtable (WLR) as a platform for collaborative work on cross-jurisdictional, cross-boundary natural resource issues. The WLR allows Western Governors to draw on the expertise of a wide range of resource management experts, landowners, and conservation professionals to devise strategies that enhance the resiliency of western working landscapes and the communities they support.

3. Western Governors point to the WGA–USDA Shared Stewardship MOU as an example of an effective framework to establish shared state-Federal priorities for forest and rangeland management, and encourage the development of similar MOUs with other Executive Branch agencies for other areas of natural resource management.
4. Effective forest and rangeland management is only possible through collaboration between Federal, state, local, and Tribal land management agencies. These agencies should strive to find new ways to collaborate on forest and rangeland management projects, as well as to explore ways to improve state-Federal coordination on existing management projects. State funds can be directed to targeted Federal projects to augment capacity, expedite project approvals and implementation, and add key state project priorities (including socioeconomic elements) to the Federal program of work. State and local governments, municipalities, water utilities and corporate partners should be encouraged to collaborate on, and co-invest in, forest and rangeland restoration—including the support of collaborative groups—across ownership boundaries in key water supply source watersheds.
5. Federal, state, local, and Tribal land managers should work to support effective collaboration on Federal projects and all-lands initiatives. Federal agencies should look to local communities as a source of strength, knowledge, and support during the planning and implementation of forest and rangeland management projects, and should be encouraged to work with local communities while planning forest and rangeland management projects.
6. Local fire protective associations play a critical role in wildfire response and mitigation, and state and Federal agencies should look for ways to further incorporate these groups into regional wildfire dispatch and coordination centers.
7. Western Governors support cost-share grants to local governments and local and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to enable their participation in Federal project planning and implementation. Federal agencies should facilitate the participation of local governments in Federal decision making by dedicating staff to develop and provide technical assistance and enhance communications across local, Tribal, state and Federal partners. Congress and the Administration should support critically important programs that enable state and local wildfire protection, such as the SFA and VFA programs, as well as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact and the All Hazards National Mutual Aid System. Western communities are encouraged to take advantage of Federal pre-fire mitigation programs, such as BRIC and HMAG. Federal agencies are encouraged to work with western states to ensure that communities' access to these grants is as efficient and streamlined as possible.
8. The USFS should continue to support states' efforts to operate within the Shared Stewardship Strategy, and Federal agencies should continue to provide support to states as they implement projects undertaken as part of the Shared Stewardship Strategy and state-level Shared Stewardship agreements. Implementation of these projects could benefit from enhanced governance and transparency around Federal funding, as well as the use of block grants to states through USFS State and Private Forestry for project implementation. States are often the conveners of collaborative interagency forest and rangeland management efforts. Federal agencies should provide funding and support to states for cost incurred during this convening role.
9. It is important to retain citizens' rights to question governmental decisions through administrative and legal means. Western Governors believe there may be an opportunity to further streamline appeals and litigation associated with National Forest decision making in association with other changes designed to incentivize collaboration and provide more certainty as to outcomes.
10. Effective forest and rangeland management requires a network of forest and rangeland infrastructure to manage, maintain, and restore western forests and rangelands. Federal and state agencies should strive to find ways to support and expand critical forest and rangeland management infrastructure, including mills, biomass facilities, and roads. Also critical is the workforce, including the rural workforce, needed to support and operate forest and rangeland management infrastructure.
11. Western Governors support the expansion of stream restoration projects in forest and rangelands, including repair or removal of culverts and other barriers to fish passage. Federal and state agencies should strive to find ways

to support and expand cost-effective means of supplying restoration projects, such as with large woody material from adjacent overstocked forests, which in turn supports the rural workforce needed to implement large-scale watershed and stream restoration efforts.

12. A thriving wood-based product market is essential to support critical forest management infrastructure. Western Governors support the expansion of wood-based product markets, and encourage USFS to develop and help fund new technologies and wood-based markets for some non-traditional products. USDA's Forest Products Laboratory is a hub for research and innovation. Supporting innovative technologies, such as cross-laminated timber and biofuels to replace diesel or jet fuel, would help bolster woody biomass utilization. Western Governors encourage the application of their knowledge and experience in a practical way in the West so that some of the federally funded infrastructure that develops from such efforts could first be demonstrated on private lands. Federal land managers should work to ensure that wood product producers have increased certainty of supply, as well as a broader suite of outlets, in addition to traditional sawmills and existing biomass facilities. Governors should work with USDA to explore mechanisms to expand low-interest loans in the forest products and woody biomass sectors to help develop rural businesses around sustainable industry. States can also work with USFS and other Federal land managers to establish more long-term stewardship agreements to ensure a long-term feedstock supply.
13. Authorities granted to the USFS in the 2018 Farm Bill, including GNA and SCA, are powerful tools to boost forest and rangeland management, promote collaboration, and limit the effects of administrative objections and litigation. Western Governors encourage Federal agencies to fully implement the tools provided in the 2018 Farm Bill and encourage all state and Federal land managers to continue to expand the use of these tools in other areas of land management. Federal agencies should expand the use of GNA agreements and other 2018 Farm Bill tools to achieve all-lands restoration objectives across Federal, state, local government and privately-owned lands. Federal agencies should use GNA authority and program income to support additional stewardship objectives such as invasive species management and rangeland conifer encroachment. Where programmatic agreements are already in place, Federal agencies should use GNA agreements to address priority restoration needs.
14. Western Governors believe clear, coordinated and consistent application of Federal vegetation management practices is integral to maintaining the health of western forests, preventing dangerous and damaging wildfires, and maintaining grid reliability. The Governors support effective and efficient cross-jurisdictional coordination that enables utilities to undertake necessary vegetation management actions on Federal transmission rights-of-way. Effective implementation by BLM and USFS of the FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act's sections related to vegetation management, in consultation with states and utilities, would make progress towards improving vegetation management in the West. Special attention should be paid to the law's direction to USFS to pair the Wildfire Hazard Potential index and map with spatial data for use at the community level, as well as its language encouraging USFS and BLM to develop training programs on vegetation management decisions relating to electrical transmission and distribution systems. Electrical utilities and state and Federal land managers should examine ways to further utilize GNA and SCA to improve vegetation management in the West.
15. Western Governors believe it is possible to reform the USFS business model in a manner that reduces project planning costs, sources funds from non-Federal partners and recognizes that the agency no longer generates large revenues from commodity programs. Federal agencies can accomplish this by:
 - Striving to identify business practice barriers to cross-boundary projects;
 - Developing training on state and Federal contracting procedures and administration for all partners to improve implementation of cross-boundary projects;
 - Utilize Service First authorities, which allow multiple agencies to partner to share resources, procurement procedures and other authorities;
 - Streamlining and consolidating agency processes with partners; and
 - Establishing multi-agency pilot projects, which can suggest models for subsequent formal agreements.

16. Western Governors support efforts to improve the effectiveness of NEPA in a forest and rangeland management context. Federal agencies should engage with Governors and states in early, meaningful, and substantive consultation throughout the NEPA process. Western Governors support allowing Federal agencies to analyze only the action and no-action alternatives when a project is collaboratively developed, unless a third alternative is proposed during scoping and meets the purpose and need of the project. Western Governors also support rewarding successful implementation of collaborative projects through funding, retained-receipt authority, or other capacity to pursue subsequent projects.
17. State and Federal agencies should look to expand the use of prescribed fire and should look for ways to reduce the statutory and regulatory barriers to its expanded use on western forests and rangelands. State and Federal air quality specialists should work together to identify reforms that reduce barriers to prescribed fire and reduce overall health impacts from smoke, improve interagency use of smoke management best practices, and examine liability protection for fire managers and compensation for private property owners negatively affected by escaped prescribed burns. Land managers across the West should strive to increase workforce capacity for prescribed fire activities, as well as science-based vegetation management activities, oversight and planning. State and Federal agencies should work to identify ways to increase the cultural acceptance of the use of prescribed fire in the West. Traditional Native American cultural burning and Tribal practices are an important part of forest management in the West and may be incorporated more effectively into Federal and state planning management processes.
18. Western Governors support efforts to improve a broad range of pre-fire mitigation practices. State and Federal agencies should work to develop tools to support mechanical hazardous fuels reduction, especially the removal of underbrush and understory, which are economically unviable in many instances. Expanding the use of spatially complex restoration treatment would help create more resilient forest through greater forest structural heterogeneity. Thinning and spatially complex treatments both address wildfire and post-fire erosion risks, but spatially complex restoration also provides habitat and biodiversity benefits that thinning does not. Invasive species, including invasive annual grasses, can be one of the greatest drivers of wildfire on western rangelands. Land managers should work to further integrate invasive species data and management practices into hazard fuels management and planning.
19. Efforts should be made by state, Federal, local, and Tribal agencies to modernize the wildland fire service and adapt it for the West's increasingly long and intense fire seasons. Federal agencies should examine their reliance on 1039 seasonal staff, shift a higher percentage of wildland fire staff from seasonal to permanent and permanent subject to furlough positions, evaluate policies related to the use of Administratively Determined emergency firefighters, and authorize hazard pay for Federal firefighters performing prescribed fire operations. Incident command teams are valuable resources in the region, and efforts should be made to ensure that these resources have adequate access to training and preparedness activities and are, as necessary, utilized for prescribed fires in a manner similar to suppression fires.
20. Western Governors support improvements to interagency communication, fire response capability, and coordination, including the sharing of firefighting resources. Fire management activities should support fire prevention, rapid response capabilities, full suppression strategies and management of wildfire for resource benefits. Agencies and stakeholders should continue to seek opportunities, including revisions to forest plans, to enhance safety and reduce costs in suppression decisions while protecting communities. Incentives should be created for local governments to take voluntary actions to support the creation and expansion of fire-adapted and smoke-ready communities and resilience, including the promotion of education, fuels management projects and improved integration of community wildfire protection plans with land use decisions when compatible with local goals. Additional analyses should be provided to help communities evaluate the full costs of suppression associated with development in the wildland urban interface.
21. Western Governors support increased attention to the challenges posed in post-wildfire landscapes and wildfire-affected communities. Restoration of forests and rangelands is an overlooked and underfunded aspect of land management activity. Cross-boundary and cross-jurisdictional collaboration is crucial to properly managing restoration efforts. Western Governors also encourage

better awareness of post-wildfire restoration funding opportunities available to wildfire-affected communities and more sophisticated coordination of restoration activities to achieve restoration objectives.

22. The West's forests and rangelands are changing: historical fire suppression patterns have altered the composition of western forests, invasive species have moved across western rangelands, and changing patterns of industry, recreation, and land-ownership have shifted the way Westerners interact with and manage forests and rangelands. Federal agencies, including the USFS and BLM, must work to build agency cultures that can adapt quickly and responsively to these changes. Climate change can accelerate many of these changes by increasing the frequency and severity of fire, altering hydrologic patterns, and expanding the potential range of invasive species, and can pose a threat to the ecosystem services derived from forests and rangelands, such as watersheds, recreation, ranching, and agriculture. Federal agencies must be prepared to adapt to changing patterns in revenue generation, increased need for restoration activities, and a changing workforce. Increasing the pace and scale of restoration work like prescribed fire, fuels reduction, and active management can help reduce the effects of climate change. Western Governors support the creation and expansion of assistance to landowners for carbon sequestration and conservation activities on private forests and rangelands.
23. Federal agencies need to ensure adequate monitoring, assessment, and analysis of Federal forests and rangelands, including data on wildlife, water, soil, and forage. Federal agencies should strive to further improve the collection of socioeconomic data related to forest and rangeland management decisions, and to further incorporate that data into management decisions. The Administration should provide Federal funding to develop detailed state rangeland action plans addressing invasive species, wildlife and fish habitat, and water quality and quantity as a complement to State Forest Plans. These rangeland plans should include resource analyses of soil health, water, plants, animals and productive capacities to inform management decision-making. The Administration should target funding from USFS, BLM, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and state sources to address cross-boundary management goals (and support monitoring and assessment frameworks) in priority areas. Projects using this targeted funding should be consistent with State Forest Action Plans, wildlife action plans, community wildfire protection plans, and projects in other priority areas determined by Federal, state, local and Tribal partners based on the best available science.
24. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support the research needed for responsible and effective forest and rangeland management in the West. Investments in widespread spatial imaging and data analytics, LiDAR or hyperspectral imaging, would improve predictive analytics and planning tools for fire and forest health. Federal agencies conducting research should also work to ensure that public research projects are focused on research that supports on the ground management needs. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to support USFS Research Stations, which play a key role in forest and rangeland management in the West.
25. The outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in 2020 posed a significant challenge to those working to manage the West's forests and rangelands, particularly wildland firefighters. State, Federal, and local wildland fire managers should be encouraged to learn from the pandemic response and, as appropriate, implement effective new management principles developed during that pandemic into permanent practice. Efforts should be made to ensure that emergency response personnel are prepared for similar situations in the future, as well as other potential risks.
26. Western Governors support the continued responsible use of Federal lands for grazing and increased funding for grazing management, monitoring, and permit condition compliance.
27. We support sound, science-based management decisions for Federal lands—including adaptive management—and believe these decisions should be based upon flexible policies that take into account local ecological conditions and state planning decisions for fish and wildlife and other human needs.
28. Federal and state land managers should identify opportunities to improve flexibility and integration of grazing management and targeted grazing as tools to achieve restoration and land management goals, including fish and wildlife habitat improvements, drought and wildfire mitigation and resilience,

water quality and watershed health, soil health management, promotion of perennial plant health, and control of invasive species such as cheatgrass. They should also promote grazing allotment flexibility on Federal lands, within USFS and BLM permitting systems and across ownership boundaries, to respond to changing rangeland conditions and environmental considerations.

29. Livestock grazing on Federal lands is compatible with recreation and wildlife management and fulfills the multiple use and sustained yield mission of both the USFS and BLM. Policies, analyses, or planning decisions that lead to closing allotments must be based on science, documented threats and causal factors consistent with state policies and programs as well as Federal multiple use missions.
30. Decisions to reduce or suspend grazing should only be made assisted by an appropriate quantitative assessment of long- and short-term trends in rangeland conditions on specific allotments, risk of spread of invasive weeds, diseases to wildlife, or other documented fish or wildlife impacts. If, after consultation with the state, the Federal agency decides to reduce, suspend, close, or modify an allotment due to documented harmful wildlife impacts, an alternative allotment, properly authorized pursuant to NEPA, if a suitable alternative allotment exists, must be made available to the displaced operator prior to adjustment of the original allotment. In order to fully implement this policy, the BLM and USFS must have alternative allotments properly authorized under relevant planning documents. This ensures that suspensions or modification of grazing permits will not result in a net loss of Animal Unit Months and that appropriate alternative allotments are available.
31. Grazing permit renewal decisions should be assisted by current site-specific, quantitative data. Federal agencies should engage in meaningful consultation, coordination and cooperation with livestock grazing permittees, state and local governments, Tribes, and stakeholders, prior to initiation and throughout the entire permit renewal process.
32. Federal land management agencies' decisions to reduce or close allotments should only be based upon completion of a full and complete administrative review and analysis, including a complete review under the provisions of NEPA. The decision process must include opportunities for states, livestock grazing permittees and other stakeholders to provide input. Allotments should not be closed due to a pending NEPA review without allowing authorized use of the allotment pending a final decision, or the use of an equivalent amount of forage at reasonably equivalent cost to compliant operators.
33. Federal rangeland specialists should have an understanding of the economics and management of ranching operations dependent upon Federal lands, and should receive the necessary training to comprehensively monitor rangelands, conduct objective analysis, and write sound environmental documents.
34. Clear directives and accountability throughout all levels of the USFS and BLM should be required so that interpretation and implementation is practical and predictable from office to office and individual to individual, and informed by an understanding of localized rangeland and ecological conditions, and economic health of ranch operations.
35. Federal land management agencies must give interested state agencies an opportunity to fully participate in or provide input to grazing permit actions—prior to their initiation—including: generalized review of livestock operations on Federal lands; any assessment of grazing conditions as part of a Federal planning process; review of past compliance of the operator with grazing allotment conditions; and individual allotment reviews. Grazing permit decisions should not be finalized until after this opportunity for meaningful consultation with the states, local governments, and the affected permittees.
36. Governors possess primary decision-making authority for management of state resources. States also have knowledge and experience that are necessary for the development of effective plans. Accordingly, it is essential that Governors have a substantive role in Federal agencies' planning processes and an opportunity to review new, revised, or amended Federal land management plans for consistency with existing state plans. Federal agencies should:
 - Provide Governors with sufficient time for a full and complete state review, especially when Federal plans affect multiple planning areas or resources.
 - Align the review of multiple plans affecting the same resource, especially for threatened or endangered species that have vast western ranges.

- Afford Governors the discretion to determine which state plans should be reviewed against Federal plans for consistency, including State Wildlife Action Plans, conservation district plans, county plans, and multi-state agreements.
 - Maintain Governors' right to appeal any rejection of recommendations resulting from a Governor's consistency review.
 - Create a database of Federal forest and rangeland management projects, available to states and other collaborators, that includes planned, current, and past projects.
37. The Federal Government should honor its historic agreements with states and counties in the West to compensate them for state and local impacts associated with Federal land use and federally owned, nontaxable lands within their borders, such as the PILT and SRS programs.
 38. The Federal Government should be a responsible landowner and neighbor and should work diligently to improve the health of Federal lands in the West. Federal actions or failures to act on Federal lands affect adjacent state and privately-owned lands, as well as state-managed natural resources.
 39. Congress and Federal agencies should provide opportunities for expanded cooperation, particularly where states are working to help their Federal partners to improve management of Federal lands through the contribution of state expertise and resources.
 40. Western Governors support efforts to examine rural communities' relationships with natural resources, such as forests, rangelands, croplands, wildlife, and source water, as well as the important role that rural communities play in the management of these resources. Policy makers in the West should be encouraged to identify barriers to growth and sustainability in western communities, including a lack of restoration infrastructure, disaster mitigation challenges, dependence upon a single natural resource, and issues related to local capacity, expertise, and funding, and identify best practices to help rural communities overcome these barriers.

C. Governors' Management Directive

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in December 2023. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.

ATTACHMENT 2

Policy Resolution 2023-01, Working Lands, Working Communities

A. Background

1. Western states face a wide array of social, economic, and environmental challenges. More frequent and intense wildfires threaten rural and urban communities, invasive annual grasses are encroaching on America's grasslands, and persistent drought threatens the quality and quantity of water supplies.
2. The fabric of western communities is tightly interwoven with the working lands and ecosystems which they steward and rely upon for cultural, social and economic health. Rural communities have an interdependent relationship with natural resources and working lands: healthy communities can support effective land management practices and the responsible use of their natural resources for multiple purposes.
3. Western lands typically involve a complex array of ownerships, including Federal, state, local and Tribal governments and private landowners. Addressing land management challenges at scale requires the involvement of all these different land owners and a shared understanding of and participation in management processes, establishment of goals, and collaboratively work toward positive land management outcomes.
4. Land management involves a continuum of activities that respond to the natural cycle of western landscapes. Mitigation activity, which includes manual

and mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and invasive species treatments, is focused on creating healthy landscapes that provide quality habitat for fish and wildlife, maintain water quantity and quality attributes, and are resilient to wildfire. When a wildfire occurs, suppression activity attempts to limit environmental damage and protect human infrastructure and homes. After a wildfire, restoration activity, including salvage operations pursuant to a forest management plan, attempts to alleviate the wildfire's effect on the environment, prevent post-fire soil erosion and flooding, and reestablish landscapes.

5. Many western communities are experiencing devastating effects from ongoing drought, including increased feed prices, the need to reduce or eliminate existing agricultural products and livestock due to lack of available water, leading some producers to consider eliminating agricultural production entirely. Additional effects are being felt by local economies reliant on the recreational economies developed around large reservoirs in western states. Drought also contributes to the increased threat of more frequent and intense wildfire and degrades habitat quality for wildlife and fish. Without substantial assistance, rural economies in western states that rely heavily on agriculture and natural resources will take years to recover from the effects of this devastating drought.
6. The drought is having downstream effects on food security and fiber and energy production, both regionally and nationally. Those effects include low or dried up reservoirs, increased algal blooms, a decrease in hydroelectric power and the potential of shuttering hydroelectric dams because of low water levels. Some drought-affected communities are already facing drinking water supply constraints, a situation that could become much more widespread with prolonged drought.
7. Data is a fundamental building block for land management planning, decision making, and accountability for outcomes. At present, data may be held by single agencies and may not be in a format accessible to other agencies, states, or the public.
8. Local capacity, including technical expertise, workforce, capital and manufacturing, affect the ability to conduct responsible management on surrounding lands and promote community adaptability and sustainability. Local land use collaboratives and coordinating capacity can have a significant role in land management processes.
9. Many western communities have suffered from the "boom and bust" economic cycles. Sustainable economic opportunities in multiple areas—from land management, extractive industries, and agriculture to recreation and tourism are critical to enabling communities that are healthy and economically resilient.
10. Economic priorities may shift in rural communities in response to market needs. Markets for products that support active management (such as mass timber and woody biomass) may be underdeveloped, and environmental conditions may be altered by wildfire or other natural disasters. Adapting to changing economic, environmental, or technological conditions requires the development and use of tools and innovations for rural communities, including the expansion of markets to support management objectives.
11. Capacity constraints across multiple disciplines, from environmental processes and compliance to responsibly conducting land management activities requires a commitment to training, equipping and sustaining a workforce capable of achieving land management objectives. An aging workforce is also a concern in many rural communities. As workers in rural communities retire, additional workforce is needed to maintain the economic viability of these communities.

B. Governors' Policy Statement

Collaboration

Planning

1. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should consider developing regional and cross-boundary collaboratives to facilitate cooperation on ecosystem-level land management challenges. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides an opportunity for communities to engage in difficult conversations on land use, but communities should be engaged earlier, and at a broader level, to ensure full benefit of the NEPA process.

2. Local collaboratives can be too near-sighted, focusing solely on wildfire mitigation. Land management agencies should consider educational opportunities for collaborative members on broader ecosystem effects of forest and rangeland management (*e.g.*, wildlife habitat, water quality, invasives), which would assist communities seeking to improve overall ecosystem health and resilience.
3. Planning tools like the Shared Wildfire Risk Mitigation system (SWRM) are invaluable in helping communities understand management needs and the effects of land use and wildfire mitigation decisions. These tools help alleviate capacity issues for communities and promote better decision making. Western Governors encourage Federal land managers to make SWRM and similar tools widely available to communities and decisionmakers.
4. Land managers should integrate small private landowners into ecosystem planning processes and responsible land management practices. Private industry has looked at U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) climate smart credits as a mechanism to spur engagement, but additional methods of gaining small landowner participation and engagement should be explored, including greater participation in local collaboratives, increased partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and involvement in shared stewardship agreement processes.
5. County governments have a positive influence on land use planning and resource management through the development of county plans. These county plans can be helpful in crafting state plans, ensuring local views are taken into consideration, and can be persuasive when collaborating with Federal agencies on land use planning. State and Federal land managers should take steps to ensure that these county resource management and other plans are integrated into their planning processes.
6. Land management agencies should be focused on outcome-based, rather than acre-based, metrics for success. While simply counting acres can provide useful information, agencies should examine how other performance metrics, including the shift of funding over time from suppression activity to mitigation and restoration activities, provides tangible evidence of the value of land management activities.
7. Land managers should prioritize post-wildfire water quality effects in mitigation planning and execution. Post-fire flooding can have a dramatic effect on infrastructure and water quality in downstream communities, and is the cause of many avoidable post-fire deaths in affected areas. Integrating water supply and quality considerations into mitigation work could significantly reduce the cost of post-fire restoration in burned areas.
8. Western Governors encourage land managers to incorporate the effects of drought into land use planning and community sustainability efforts. Drought, among other effects, has impacts on wildfire threat, wildlife and fish habitat, agricultural and ranching productivity, recreational opportunity, power generation, and drinking water availability, all of which threaten community sustainability. Mitigating these effects, to the extent feasible, is critical to ensuring the future vitality of many western communities.
9. Land managers should evaluate the use of area-wide plans under NEPA; this would allow planning for cross-boundary landscapes under a single NEPA process and produce multiple resource benefits.
10. States, Tribes and counties can use Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to facilitate management activities on Federal lands. Federal agencies should take steps to ensure that various GNA projects integrate with each other to achieve desired outcomes and provide opportunities to increase collaboration and increase cross-boundary cooperation with these governmental units.
11. Congress should codify and direct funding to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to facilitate continued partnership and investment between USFS and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to support restoration projects where Federal and private land ownership and management goals intersect.
12. Western Governors recognize that prescribed fire is an important tool for fuels reduction and ecosystem resilience, but is underused in the West. Prescribed fire has overall air quality benefits, eliminates low- or no-value woody biomass in forest and rangeland environments, and contributes to soil health. Educating the public and creating social license to use the tool is critical; however, recent events have also shown that land managers must put greater

effort into coordinating prescribed fire with other mitigation activities, updating models, tools and practices for safe burning, and putting a greater emphasis on post-burn preparation and monitoring to reduce the potential for escaped burns.

13. In many cases, different state, territorial and Federal agencies manage the planning and authorization for prescribed fire, which can add delays to implementing prescribed burns, or cause managers to entirely miss opportunities to use the tool. Land managers should consider greater collaboration for prescribed fire activities to increase deployment. Traditional Native American cultural burning and Tribal practices are an important part of forest management in the West and may be incorporated more effectively into Federal and state planning management processes. Additionally, land managers should have adequate liability insurance to protect individuals and landowners affected by escaped prescribed fires.

Funding and Capacity

14. Financial support for local collaboratives is important to achieving community engagement, subject matter expertise, and long-term success. Federal agencies should examine structures to improve local collaborative capacity.
15. The transition from active wildfire suppression activity to post-wildfire community responsibilities can be abrupt at the community level. Wildfire affected communities, especially in resource-constrained communities, need subject matter expertise on post-fire restoration and risk management to guide them through recovery. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to designate and train post-fire coordinators to manage post-fire recovery. Establishing a post-fire master agreement would also improve the processes involving incident management and post-fire handoff to local authorities.
16. In many cases, wildfire affected communities must provide a funding match to access restoration programs and resources. Match requirements negatively affect resource-constrained communities' ability to access funds, especially in underserved communities that often lack the personnel or other capacity to administer these programs due to small annual operating budgets. This contributes to inadequate post-fire response, reduced landscape resilience, and suboptimal ecosystem recovery. Federal agencies should examine funding match requirements and consider reducing or eliminating these requirements when the public benefit outweighs the cost of the funding match.
17. Congress should extend the authorization for states to retain revenues from timber sales under GNA, which may then be used to "carry out authorized restoration services on Federal land under the good neighbor agreement;" and if excess funds are available, "to carry out authorized restoration services on Federal land within the state under other good neighbor agreements." This authority is statutorily scheduled to terminate on October 1, 2023. Congress should also consider extending retained receipt authority to county governments and Tribes.
18. Increase flexibility in the GNA program: (1) on road construction/reconstruction; (2) for recreation improvements and forest and rangeland restoration planning and implementation activities; and (3) to support better prioritization of GNA projects across larger geographies.

Agency Cultural Issues

19. Forestry and land management agencies, including the Department of the Interior (DOI) and USDA, have separated fire management from land management. Western Governors recognize there needs to be integration of these functions to ensure mitigation efforts produce wildfire-resilient landscapes and communities, suppression activities orient toward restoration needs, and restoration work addresses community needs and future landscape resilience.
20. Federal land management agencies should consider investing in facilitation capacity and training for agency personnel and partner organizations involved with collaboratives and wildfire-affected communities. Facilitation skills are an essential element in helping resolve conflict and achieving consensus on mitigation and restoration decisions.

Data

21. The Federal Government and states should consider collaboratively developing interagency data hubs to reduce overall operating costs, increase the shareability of data (*i.e.*, establishing data standards and formats that are useable and sharable), and facilitate public access to the data.

22. States, Territories and Federal agencies should consider establishing coordinators for data collection, transfer and assimilation to ensure that data is shareable and useable between platforms. Western Governors encourage agencies to consider standardizing and simplifying data collection protocols for Federal agencies, states, counties and Tribes which include robust land-owner privacy standards and protections.
23. Federal agencies should incorporate socioeconomic data into the decision-making process. In places with complex economic foundations (agriculture, mining, oil and gas), an economic assessment is key to quantifying and understanding the implications of land use decisions.
24. Western Governors recognize that many local governments do not have the capacity or budget to keep datasets current. Federal agencies should consider implementing a model or framework to share resources to address these capacity and budget issues.
25. Federal, state, and territorial land managers should collaborate on developing integrated methods and processes for visitor data collection and analysis. This would help track where visitors are recreating, the activities they are participating in, and assist in placing tourism infrastructure and addressing other tourism infrastructure-related needs. It would also provide important data to inform needs to shift visitation from overused to less-trafficked areas, sustain tourism if Federal land closures are needed, and improve recreational experiences for visitors.

Infrastructure

26. Forest and rangeland management access and infrastructure in much of the West is woefully inadequate to address land management needs. Access is critical to perform management activities for wildfire mitigation, habitat improvement, water quality improvements, invasive species management, and post-fire restoration. Western Governors encourage Federal agencies to ensure that appropriate access and infrastructure, in appropriate locations, exists to achieve land management objectives. Repairing and replacing range improvements, particularly fencing, in a timely manner should be a priority for Federal land management agencies in wildfire-affected areas.
27. Western Governors encourage Federal agencies to integrate infrastructure needs into planning processes and provide long-term, sustainable economic opportunities for communities. Federal agencies should also recognize that regulatory certainty is an important element of enabling infrastructure deployment. Consistency in permitting and policy is key to attracting and maintaining infrastructure investments.
28. Federal agencies should consider integration of permitting processes to establish single point permitting for its permittees. Streamlining permitting processes would provide benefits for land managers, project implementers, and the tourism and recreation industry.
29. Federal agencies should evaluate the use of regional recreation partnerships to address infrastructure and repair needs for tourism-related infrastructure. A GIS tool to identify trails and assess visitation effects would assist land managers in addressing trail degradation and the need for new trail development.
30. Western Governors recognize that additional nursery capacity is needed to address post-wildfire restoration needs. Federal agencies should examine the need for market incentives to encourage sustainable nursery markets and facilitate the development of additional nursery capacity.
31. Western Governors recognize that harvest cost is a significant issue for producers. Economies of scale have affected the packing industry, and in many cases small packing houses are booked months in advance due to lack of capacity. USDA should consider how communities can develop additional small packing capacity to ensure access for producers and improve national food security.
32. The supply chain for basic land management equipment, such as vehicles and chainsaws, is integral to implementing management plans authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The Federal Government should take steps to address equipment shortages as part of its implementation of the IJA.

Markets

33. Predictable, long-term supply assurances are needed to attract private infrastructure investment and improve overall forest and rangeland management capacity. DOI and USDA should consider how its annual timber harvesting targets can ensure adequate long-term supply. USFS and BLM should modify GNA guidance to allow 20 year contracts, *versus* the current limit of 10 years, to provide additional supply stability.
34. Congress should expand GNA and Stewardship Contracting Authority (SCA) to other Federal land managers, which is currently limited to USFS and BLM. Land and facilities owned by the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would also benefit from projects implemented under GNA and SCA.
35. Many mitigation projects have high treatment costs with low or little opportunity to recoup those costs. This requires a broader view of investments in wildfire mitigation. Western Governors encourage Federal agencies to include cost metrics such as the avoided cost of uncharacteristic wildfire, smoke effects on populations, and benefits to water supply systems and downstream communities when assessing the merits of mitigation projects.
36. Different Federal agencies use different strategies to achieve land management outcomes. For example, USFS strategy primarily relies on a “payments for product” model, while NRCS primarily uses a “payments for practice” strategy to achieve land management objectives. Agencies should consider lessons learned from these different strategies and how different payment models could be used to improve management outcomes.
37. Given the importance of the tourism economy, statewide strategic tourism plans, developed in collaboration with Federal agencies, can improve coordination between tourism operators on Federal lands.
38. A significant barrier to producer investments in soil health and restoration is the cost of equipment to test new practices. Federal agencies should consider incentives to purchase equipment, participate in new processes, or expand markets to encourage deploying new conservation practices.
39. Federal agencies should examine the grazing effects different ruminants have on ecosystems and encourage the targeted deployment of ruminants (*i.e.*, cattle, sheep and goats) to achieve specific land management outcomes.
40. Federal agencies should continue to explore strategies for the use of low or no value biomass, removal of which is needed to achieve wildfire mitigation needs, including market incentives for these materials. Biomass power at utility scale may present such an opportunity, but there is market failure to represent the true value of a bioenergy supply chain. Western Governors encourage DOI, USDA and the Department of Energy to continue research and development efforts to find viable markets for low and no value biomass.
41. Western Governors recognize that market interventions can affect land management decision making. Market incentives for one desired outcome may negatively affect overall ecosystem health and resilience. Federal agencies should take steps to eliminate counterproductive ecosystem outcomes that may arise from different market incentives. Agencies should consider holistic approaches that incorporate ecosystem health, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, water supply and quality and other factors.
42. Federal agencies should expand opportunities for existing USDA Rural Development, U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) programs and financing to support wood product business development and infrastructure.
43. USFS Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and National Forest System should work collaboratively to support existing and emerging wood products technologies, including the work of the National Forest Products Laboratory, with the goal of expanding markets to maximize restoration activity. Research, development and deployment should be focused on commercially ready technologies with high potential to contribute to current and emerging restoration objectives. These efforts should be aligned with the work of industry partners, and actively pursue public-private partnerships to advance market growth, with the goal of providing sustainable economic development opportunities for rural communities.
44. Western Governors encourage Federal agencies to identify initiatives to support markets that can achieve restoration goals and foster near-term opportunities for economic development in rural communities. These opportunities in-

clude advancing the use of mass timber in building construction through research and demonstration projects. Expanding utilization of low-value woody biomass for thermal, electric and liquid-fuel energy should also be a priority. Rural electric cooperatives, public utilities, community facility managers, and other partners should contribute to the research, testing and deployment of new and modified heat and electric generation projects and liquid-fuel facilities from hazardous fuels reduction, conifer removal and other forest and rangeland restoration efforts. Finally, agencies should explore opportunities to support new and diversified rangeland products, markets and processing infrastructure, such as mobile meat processing, renewable energy production, local and regional food hubs, and recreation.

45. Congress should pass legislation to promote forest and rangeland product markets and technologies, and expand funding for the Community Wood Energy Program. Western Governors support the use of program funds to create and incentivize state, Federal and Tribal partnerships in support of these objectives.

Workforce Development

46. Capacity is a significant need in resource-constrained communities. These communities are often not able to invest in basic processes, including writing grant applications and conducting environmental analyses, needed to address landscape needs. Federal agencies should take steps to assist resource-constrained communities in developing these needed capacities.
47. Western Governors recognize that housing costs impede the ability to attract and retain workers in many rural areas. Forest and rangeland management work is inherently place based, making local housing affordability a high priority to retain a workforce capable of planning and executing land management activities. Housing and recruitment are significantly greater challenges in rural communities compared to urban areas. The Federal Government should focus attention on housing needs and assist communities seeking to attract and retain workforce.
48. Federal capacity to complete NEPA processes in a timely manner is a significant bottleneck to project implementation on Federal lands. Western Governors recognize that the workforce responsible for NEPA processes is specialized and encourages Federal land management agencies to bolster this capacity to ensure that management projects are implemented on a timely basis.
49. Federal agencies should consider how interagency shared positions can create regulatory efficiencies and promote greater collaboration between Federal, state, territorial, local and Tribal land managers pursuant to traditional understandings of jurisdictions.
50. Apprenticeship and internship programs can reduce costs associated with building expertise within a workforce. Western Governors recognize that 4 year college degree programs are not needed for many forest and rangeland careers and that a focus on trades training provides better workforce outcomes. The Federal Government and employers should consider work experience and other non-traditional credentials in hiring and promotions and avoid credential creep to ensure adequate capacity for land management project implementation.
51. Western Governors recognize that Federal agencies are struggling with recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce. Workforce that could be used for mitigation or restoration work may be deployed to fight wildland fire for a significant portion of the year. Within the wildland firefighting workforce, increased wildfire activity, low salaries, and mental fatigue contribute to workforce loss. Congress and Federal agencies have taken steps to address these challenges, but the Federal Government should consider additional steps to recruit and retain an effective land management and wildland firefighting workforce.
52. Federal agencies should collaborate with states to explore the expanded use of youth, veterans, inmate crews and conservation corps to provide cost-effective capacity to support forest and rangeland restoration work across various land ownerships. Congress should enact legislation, such as the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act, to make it easier for young people and veterans to complete quality, cost-effective maintenance and improvement projects on public and Tribal lands and waters across the country. The Federal Government, states, and territories should also examine standards on hiring persons with criminal backgrounds to promote employment opportuni-

ties for qualified applicants that present minimal risk for future criminal behavior.

C. Governors' Management Directive

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in July 2025. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.

