CONSERVATION IN A CROWN JEWEL: A DISCUSSION ABOUT WILDFIRES AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

Friday, August 11, 2023, in Yosemite National Park, California

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OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING ON CONSERVATION IN A CROWN JEWEL: A DISCUSSION ABOUT WILDFIRES AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

Friday, August 11, 2023
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Yosemite National Park, California

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:56 a.m. Pacific Daylight Time, in Curry Village Amphitheatre, Yosemite National Park, Yosemite, California, Hon. Bruce Westerman [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Westerman, McClintock, Tiffany, and Duarte.

Also present: Representatives Newhouse and Valadao.

Ranger GEDIMAN. We would like to welcome you all here to Yosemite National Park this morning.

We are very pleased that you all came, and very pleased that the Committee came, and we are looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

Welcome to the park and enjoy your day. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Scott.

The Committee on Natural Resources will come to order.

I would like to welcome everybody to Curry Village here in the heart of Yosemite National Park for an official Natural Resources Committee oversight hearing titled "Conservation in a Crown Jewel: A Discussion About Wildfires and Forest Management."

The Committee is meeting today to discuss the real-world consequences of failed forest management policies and catastrophic wildfires.

Before we begin our official business, we will begin this hearing with the presentation of the colors by the Mariposa County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard.

[Presentation of colors.]

The CHAIRMAN. We will now be led in the Pledge of Allegiance by Bobby Macaulay, Supervisor for Madera County.

Mr. MACAULAY. Please join me for the Pledge of Allegiance.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The CHAIRMAN. Be seated.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Committee at any time.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to participate in today's hearing from the dais: the gentleman from Washington and the Chairman of the Congressional Western

Caucus, Mr. Newhouse, and the gentleman from California, Mr. Valadao.

Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member. I therefore ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

Today, the House Committee on Natural Resources has the great privilege of convening this hearing in the heart of one of our nation's crown jewels, Yosemite National Park.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to acknowledge our hosts today, the National Park Service and Aramark, and thank them for all the hard work they put in behind the scenes to make this event happen.

I would also like to thank Congressman Tom McClintock, a senior member of the Committee, for hosting us in his district. And I also acknowledge the Chairman of the Western Caucus, Congressman Dan Newhouse, for joining us today.

I now recognize myself for opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. BRUCE WESTERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARKANSAS

The CHAIRMAN. May 15, 1903, a train from Oakland pulls into the small town of Raymond just south of here where John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt headed to the Mariposa Grove for quite possibly the most significant 3-day camping trip in history.

After evading the press, the President sent his troops and others in the entourage to the Wawona Hotel so that he and Muir could spend time uninterrupted in Yosemite.

While recounting the trip in 1915, Roosevelt wrote: "He met me with a couple of pack mules, as well as with riding mules for himself and myself."

Roosevelt then continued: "The first night we camped in a grove of giant sequoias. It was clear weather, and we lay in the open, the enormous cinnamon-colored trunks rising about us like the columns of a vaster and more beautiful cathedral than was ever conceived by any human architect."

Further on, in describing Muir's work in Yosemite, Roosevelt penned: "Great natural phenomena—wonderful canyons, giant trees, slopes of flower-spangled hillsides—which make California a veritable Garden of the Lord."

I agree with Roosevelt. This is a genuine garden of the Lord. But I also believe that, if Roosevelt could see the condition of the garden today, he would agree with me that the garden needs tending.

And not only this magnificent, iconic garden of the Yosemite, but the many gardens of our beloved public lands that are be being denuded by new kinds of timber barons—insects, disease, and ultimately catastrophic wildfires—that we have invited into the gardens through unintended actions of mismanagement.

In a sense, we are loving our forests to death.

In light of the evidence and the challenges before us, we must embrace a new conservation ethos. It is up to us to correct the mistakes we have made and begin anew to conserve our nation's bountiful lands and resources by striking the right balance among corrective actions, our current needs, and our obligations to future generations to leave this garden of the Lord better than we found it.

We have fallen far short of truly conserving our public lands, including Yosemite. Over a century of fire suppression and mismanagement have transitioned our Federal forests from garden-like sanctuaries to overstocked, overstressed thickets that are incinerating at a rapid pace.

Historically, California had roughly 64 trees per acre. Now that number is over 300 trees per acre. These overstocked forests become more susceptible to insects, disease, and ultimately stand-replacing fire as trees are forced to compete for the limited resources they need to survive: water, nutrients, and sunlight.

The results speak for themselves. In the last decade, wildfires have torched over 72 million acres in an area roughly the size of the entire state of Arizona.

California has been at the epicenter of this crisis. During the last 5 years, wildfires in the state have burned 8.7 million acres, which is an astonishing 22 percent of the total acreage burned across the nation.

Behind these wildfires are lost lives, communities destroyed, ecosystems and wildlife habitat irreparably damaged, access and opportunities for outdoor recreation taken away, air and water dangerously polluted, billions of dollars in economic losses year after year, and millions more tons of carbon gasified and needlessly jettisoned into the global atmosphere.

This self-inflicted devastation is widespread. But perhaps nothing exemplifies our wildfire crisis more than the loss of 20 percent of the world's giant sequoias in just 2 short years.

Just last year, the Mariposa Grove, which we toured yesterday, was threatened by fire. Firefighters and land managers alike both credited prior fuels-reduction treatments, such as mechanical thinning and prescribed burning, as saving the grove.

We know these treatments work, and I commend the good people in the Park Service who are dedicated to managing correctly, like Cicely Muldoon, Garrett Dickman, Athena Demetry, Dan Buckley, and the crew we visited with yesterday.

Our Federal land managers, not the ones in DC but the ones doing the work in the field, have had their hands tied by bureaucratic tape and frivolous lawsuits. They have had to follow the litigation, not any legitimate scientific findings.

In fact, less than 2 hours from this very hearing, the Nelder Grove in Sierra National Forest is being litigated for taking emergency actions to save giant sequoias, the very emergency actions that protected the Mariposa Grove last year.

In an op-ed, *The Sacramento Bee* said this of the environmental organization currently suing to stop the protection of giant sequoias, "By weaponizing Federal protections—such as the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act—to obstruct or outright kill various wildfire prevention

projects, environmentalists imperil the very ecosystems they wish to protect."

Finally, there exists an outcry in today's world for Congress to take climate action. I hear it quite often and repeatedly get asked about it by a shortsighted press.

C.S. Lewis said: "Put first things first, and we get second things thrown in. Put second things first, and we lose both first and second things."

We are losing today because we are putting second things first. The hitch pin of a healthy environment is a healthy forest. Healthy forest equals cleaner air, cleaner water, more plant and animal biodiversity, more wildlife, better outdoor recreational and sportsman opportunities, and, yes, less greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

If we can't take the simple, common-sense, science-based, and empirically proven steps to partner together to restore Yosemite and our other beloved Federal lands to the veritable gardens of the Lord that Roosevelt described, then I contend that, as stewards of the gardens, we have grossly misplaced our priorities and have forgotten how to put first things first.

But we are better than that. And it is in our heritage, in our American DNA, to do better than that.

In his letter to Muir requesting the famous camping trip 2 months before Roosevelt arrived in Yosemite, he wrote, "I do not want anyone with me but you, and I want to drop politics absolutely for 4 days and just be out in the open with you."

When it comes to our forests and our Federal lands, let's drop the politics long enough to put first things first and do the right thing. Who knows, we might learn something from being good stewards of our forests that will make us better stewards of our country.

With that, I yield back my time.

I will now recognize Congressman Tom McClintock, who represents this district, for any openings statement that he may wish to make.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM MCCLINTOCK, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Committee for holding this hearing today in Yosemite National Park and welcome all of you to the hearing as well.

The Yosemite Grant of 1864 was the first time that Federal land was set aside for the enjoyment of the American people. In the words of the Act, this was done, "upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation; [and] Shall be inalienable for all time."

This set in motion the events that ultimately led to the creation of the National Park Service, again, with the express purpose to, "conserve the scenery and the natural and historical objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same."

And I want to recognize the National Park rangers who have ever since welcomed and encouraged succeeding generations of Americans who come to visit and enjoy their public lands.

I might also add that this park is absolutely vital to the communities that surround it, whose economies depend upon the tourism

that it generates, and that rely on the Federal Government to be a good neighbor in preserving, maintaining, and managing these lands.

As we look at the fire-scarred landscape of the past decade, it is becoming obvious we are not meeting our responsibility to properly manage these lands.

An untended forest is no different than an untended garden. It is going to grow and grow until it chokes itself to death, and then it will succumb to disease, pestilence, drought, and, ultimately, catastrophic fire. This is how nature gardens, and she is a lousy gardener. You doubt that, just leave your garden alone for 50 years and see what happens.

Excess timber will come out of the forest, and it comes out in only two ways: Either we will carry it out or nature will burn it out. Nature doesn't care that it takes centuries for a forest to return. We mortals do. That is why we set up these land agencies to remove excess timber before it could choke off the forest or be consumed by fire.

Every year, foresters would mark off surplus timber. We would auction it off to logging companies who then paid us to remove it. Twenty-five percent of those revenues from Federal timber auctions went to local communities like Mariposa, and the other 75 percent went back into our forests.

For a century, we enjoyed healthy, fire-resistant, and resilient national forests and thriving local economies, as well.

But then, in the 1970s, we passed laws like NEPA and ESA that have made the act of management of our forests endlessly time consuming and ultimately cost prohibitive. A simple forest management plan now takes an average of 4½ years to complete. The environmental studies now exceed 800 pages, they cost millions of dollars, more than the value of the timber to be harvested.

Though it shouldn't surprise us, in those years timber harvested off the Federal lands have dropped 80 percent. And with the Federal timber supply cut off, the number of mills has shrunk from 149 in 1981 to just 39 today.

So, nature has returned to remove the excess timber by burning it out. The acreage destroyed by catastrophic fire in California has exploded from a quarter million acres a year throughout the 20th century to 4 million acres last year.

Now, these laws were imposed with the promise that they would improve the forest environment. I think after 50 years we are entitled to ask how the forest environment is doing.

We were able to get a categorical exclusion from NEPA for forest-thinning projects in the Tahoe Basin. In the 7 years since its enactment, it has reduced the study time from 4½ years to just 4 months. It has reduced the environmental reports from more than 800 pages to just a few dozen.

Timber harvested has increased from roughly a million board feet a year in Tahoe to 9 million board feet on average. The treated acreage in the Tahoe Basin has tripled. And the forests are returning to fire resiliency. This saved the city of South Lake Tahoe from the Caldor Fire just 2 years ago.

The Save Our Sequoias bill would employ the same reform to protect our sequoia stands. My bill, H.R. 188, would extend this

proven reform throughout the Federal lands. Both have been marked up by this Committee, but they still await a vote on the House Floor.

I agree, this should not be a partisan issue. The question is between policies that are proven to work and policies that have proven to fail.

John Muir once said that when people visit Yosemite they may arrive as tourists but they leave as evangelists. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for coming to Yosemite today. Let us all go forth from this hearing determined to evangelize to save our forests.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

We don't have on and off buttons; the microphones are hot. We do use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red. You can see the clock right here in front of us. I will ask you to please complete your statement if you haven't completed it in 5 minutes.

I will now recognize the first witness, the Honorable Miles Menetrey, the Supervisor for Mariposa County.

Supervisor Menetrey, you have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MILES MENETREY, SUPERVISOR, MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Mr. MENETREY. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Full Committee, thank you for holding this hearing to discuss wildfire and forest management. Welcome to Mariposa County.

My name is Miles Menetrey, and I have been a member of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors since 2017. I serve on the board of the National Association of Counties and on NACo's Public Lands Steering Committee. I offer my testimony today on behalf of NACo.

Mariposa County is the gateway to two national forests and Yosemite. Life here is tied to public lands. Approximately half our county is federally owned. More than one-third of all employers in Mariposa County are directly tied to tourism and recreation and are responsible for more than 60 percent of our local taxes.

The management decisions made by Federal agencies impact our quality of life. Federal agency decisions have left our forests overcrowded, unhealthy, and fire prone.

Reducing fuel loads will re-establish healthy landscapes, watersheds, and communities. Healthy forests, as the Chairman said, purify air and water, increase biodiversity, are less susceptible to catastrophic fire, and grow local economies.

Increased timber harvests where appropriate, greater use of mechanical thinning, controlled burns, and expedited NEPA process will enhance forest health, spur economic activity, and improve our visitor experience.

Catastrophic fires have disproportionate effect on the West. Wildland fires no longer speak in terms of fire season but, instead, refer to the fire year.

So far this year, over 1.3 million acres have burned nationwide. Since 2017, more than 325 square miles have burned here in Mariposa County, one-quarter of our land area. If you arranged it in a straight line, 1 mile wide, it would extend from this park to Los Angeles.

In 2018, the Ferguson Fire burned 97,000 acres of Federal land, resulted in two firefighter deaths, and cost nearly $300 million in damages and suppression. We have lost more than 200 homes to wildfire, including 127 burned last year in our Oak Fire, which incinerated an additional 20,000 acres.

Wildfires also have a detrimental effect on public health. After our Oak Fire, 55 percent reported worsening depression or anxiety. Some of those who lose everything in a wildfire experience thoughts of suicide.

While the causes of wildfire are complex, inaction exacerbates a dangerous situation. Counties work to build consensus and implement projects with our Federal partners. Projects developed through consensus-based, collaborative process should be approved expeditiously. By engaging counties early and often, Federal agencies will find willing and eager partners.

We and our nonprofit partners are implementing our award-winning Community Wildfire Protection Plan by constructing fuel breaks, seeking grants to support fire-mitigation projects, and providing grants for fuel-reduction projects. We recently purchased nearly 300 acres of land adjacent to the town of Mariposa to build fuel breaks.

Congress should help improve forest management in several ways:

First, Congress should treat counties and tribes as genuine partners under a good neighbor agreement. States can reinvest 25 percent of revenues generated from the GNA projects and further forest restoration work. We ask Congress to give counties and tribes the same ability to reinvest GNA project revenues.

Congress should also update NEPA to require the costs and benefits of a project to be weighed against the consequences of doing nothing.

The choice not to manage our forests is a management decision that has led to catastrophic results. Federal agencies should actively attack wildfires at the ignition source. The initial reaction to a new ignition should be to develop a suppression plan rather than taking the default action of monitoring to determine if it meets objectives.

Finally, the Federal Government needs to focus on infrastructure and workforce development. Federal forests often lack the infrastructure to profitably remove fuel loads and small-diameter trees.

We also need a well-trained Federal workforce and ask Federal agencies to ensure staff are not frequently moved to new communities.

Agencies must also create innovative intergovernmental partnerships for affordable housing to attract and retain quality personnel.

Thank you for your invitation to testify. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Menetrey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MILES MENETREY, SUPERVISOR, MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Chairman Westerman and members of the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, thank you for holding this hearing to discussion wildfires and forest management in one of the crown jewels of our nation's conservation legacy.

My name is Miles Menetrey, and I have been a member of the Mariposa County, California Board of Supervisors since 2017. I am a native Californian and have lived in Mariposa County since being displaced by the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. I operated my own construction business here in Mariposa County until I was sworn in as a County Supervisor. I currently serve as a Board Member for the National Association of Counties' (NACo) and on NACo's Public Lands Steering Committee. I offer my testimony today on behalf of NACo.

Mariposa County has a population of 17,000 people and serves as a gateway to the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, and of course, Yosemite National Park. Life in Mariposa County is tied to our federally owned lands. More than one-third of all employers in Mariposa County are directly related to tourism and recreation. These businesses are responsible for more than 60 percent of the local property, sales, and transient occupancy taxes.

Mariposa County is directly and significantly impacted by the federal lands in our county. Over half our county is federally owned and therefore exempt from taxes and the development that could generate revenue to support the services provided for these areas. We are caught in limbo when it comes to financing essential county government services because the Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program is substantially less than our local property taxes would require and subject to the annual discretionary appropriations process. The Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program will expire in September, forcing counties to consider making cuts to critical services like search and rescue operations. We are excited to see the inclusion of one year of full funding of PILT in both the House and Senate Interior Appropriations bills, as well as the introduction of three-year SRS reauthorization legislation in both chambers. We respectfully request that Congress act on both vital programs to ensure continuity in public lands county budgets. Without these commitments, the County will not be able to deliver essential services to the people in our community.

In addition to the budgetary constraints caused by federal landownership, the management decisions made by federal lands agencies directly impact Mariposa County's environment, economy and quality of life. While counties work closely with federal agencies to manage our natural resources, we are constrained in our ability to influence outcomes. Unfortunately, policies determined in Washington have left our forests overcrowded, unhealthy and fire prone.

Active forest management will reduce the threat of wildfire in the West. Reducing fuel loads on federal lands will reestablish healthy, thriving landscapes, watersheds and communities. Healthy forests managed through practical, scientific practices purify air and water, increase biodiversity, are less susceptible to catastrophic fire and support economic growth. Increasing commercial timber harvests where appropriate, expanding the use of mechanical thinning and controlled burns in coordination with state and local governments, and reducing red tape to get through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process will ameliorate forest health, spur economic activity in rural communities and improve the experience of those public lands visitors on which our county relies.

Impacts of Fires in Mariposa County

Landscape-scale catastrophic wildfires have a disproportionate effect on our environment and communities in Western states. Wildland fire managers no longer talk in terms of "fire season" but instead refer to the "fire year." Increased wildfire suppression costs in money and man hours rob our federal lands agencies of necessary personnel for approving land management projects, deprive federal and state agencies of funds that could be used to improve landscapes and the visitor experience, and redirect county efforts from the services our community needs and expects to supporting federal emergency response and mitigating impacts for evacuees and others who have been unnecessarily impacted.

So far this year, over 1.3 million acres have burned nationwide. While precipitation levels broke records last winter, the current hot, dry summer, combined with decades worth of fuel buildup leaves us vulnerable to a catastrophic conflagration at any moment. Since 2017, more than 325 square miles have burned in Mariposa County. This is about a quarter of the total land area of our county. If the burned area could be arranged in a straight line a mile wide, it would extend from Yosemite to Los Angeles.

The 2018 Ferguson Fire, which burned 97,000 acres entirely on federal land, resulted in the death of two firefighters and cost nearly $300 million in damages and suppression efforts.[1] In the middle of a housing crisis, we have lost more than 200 homes to wildfire, including 127 burned during last year's Oak Fire which also incinerated 20,000 acres of mostly federal lands. Most of those who lose homes are uninsured or underinsured and private insurance companies have canceled thousands of policies in zip codes where fires may occur, regardless of individual home hardening or property maintenance.

Wildfires also have a detrimental effect on local public health. In 2017, Mariposa County, which has very limited private therapy or mental health service options, experienced a 300 percent increase in requests for counseling and mental health support, including 500 new requests from children in local schools. In the wake of the Oak Fire, 55 percent of our population reported worsening depression or anxiety. Some of those who lose everything in a wildfire experience thoughts of suicide.

As smoke billows into the air, everyone breathing that air is impacted—especially children, those with pre-existing medical conditions, and the elderly. Warm daytime air lifts smoke into the atmosphere, but when cooler weather sets in at night, the smoke descends back into our communities, workplaces, and homes. The charred post-fire landscapes leave hazardous trees and the threat of potential mudslides which can cause further damage to our environment, water sources, lives, and our private property.

Addressing Wildfire Threats

While the causes of catastrophic wildfires are complex, inaction exacerbates a dangerous situation. This problem can be solved if federal agencies forge strong partnerships with states, counties, tribes, industry, residents and conservationists.

Counties across the United States are ready to engage in collaborative efforts to address the forest health crisis. Counties have a long track record of working in good faith to build consensus and implementing effective and collaborative projects with our federal partners. Projects developed through consensus-based collaborative processes should be approved expeditiously to increase the number of acres treated. Furthermore, the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are legally required to coordinate forest or resource management plans with county land management plans to reduce conflicts. By engaging counties early and often, federal agencies will find willing, eager partners to reduce the catastrophic fire threat.

Mariposa County and our government and nonprofit partners are implementing our award-winning Community Wildfire Protection Plan by constructing fuel breaks, seeking grants to support fire mitigation projects, and providing grants for fuel reduction projects. We have recently purchased nearly 300 acres adjacent to the town of Mariposa to build mosaic fuel breaks and prevent catastrophic wildfire loss.

It is not enough. There is so much more to do.

Congress can help improve forest management in several ways. First, Congress should treat counties and tribes as genuine partners under a Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA), which allows the U.S. Forest Service to enter into agreements with other governmental entities to conduct necessary restoration work on our national forests. States can reinvest 25 percent of revenues generated from GNA projects in further forest restoration work. We ask Congress to give counties and tribes the same ability to reinvest 25 percent of GNA project revenues by passing the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act. We applaud bipartisan leaders in both chambers for sponsoring this legislation.

Similarly, stewardship contracting proves that a market-driven approach to forest management projects can work to achieve both environmental goals and increased forest production. Counties support and are active partners in stewardship contracting initiatives across the United States, but again, cannot benefit from the revenues they generate. Counties support expanding stewardship contract receipt sharing to allow counties and tribes the same authority as states to reinvest receipts in management projects.

NEPA should be reformed by requiring the costs and benefits of a proposed forest management project to be weighed against the consequences of doing nothing to address wildfire threats, disease and insect infestation, and potential impacts to local water supplies, air quality and wildlife habitat. The choice not to manage our national forests is a management decision that will continue to lead to catastrophic results.

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[1] https://cpaw.headwaterseconomics.org/project/mariposa-county-california/

Federal agencies should also more actively attack wildfires at the ignition source. We encourage reform to the Wildland Fire Decision Support System for more aggressive wildfire management suppression and project management through evaluation of economic and environmental impacts to communities and other jurisdictions. The initial reaction to a new ignition should be to develop a suppression plan if it poses a threat to communities, landscapes or watersheds, rather than taking the default action of monitoring a new fire to determine if it meets management objectives.

Finally, the federal government needs to focus extensively on infrastructure and workforce development improvements in public lands counties. Oftentimes private industries, which can be some of our strongest partners in forest management, find that federal forests lack the necessary infrastructure to profitably remove fuel loads and take small diameter trees to processing facilities. The federal government must also invest in a strong, well-trained workforce that can expeditiously conduct NEPA analyses for specific projects and develop resource management plans. Federal agencies should also ensure staff are not frequently moved to different positions in new communities, which will allow for better relationship building between the federal government and local officials. Agencies must also create innovative intergovernmental partnerships for affordable housing to attract and retain quality personnel.

Conclusion

Chairman Westerman and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify. Counties urge Congress to enact policies to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire to our forests, communities, public health and rural economies. I appreciate the opportunity to tell our story and offer some ideas for improving the quality of federal public lands.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Supervisor Menetrey.

I now recognize the Honorable George Turnboo, Supervisor of El Dorado——

Mr. TURNBOO. Dorado.

The CHAIRMAN. I have an El Dorado in my state, but I know you say it different here.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. GEORGE TURNBOO, SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT II, EL DORADO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Mr. TURNBOO. Thank you for having me, the House Committee on Natural Resources. I am glad to be here to testify on the people in Grizzly Flats and the Caldor Fire.

I am George Turnboo, a District II Supervisor and eighth-generation resident in the county of El Dorado.

I have never witnessed destruction as such as the great magnitude of the Caldor Fire of 2021. The massive wildfire destroyed the community of Grizzly Flats, California, and left most people homeless with the loss of sense of community, whose destruction included the only school, post office, church, water infrastructure, the Grizzly Flats water agency, and hundreds of homes.

Compounding these losses, Grizzly Flats has a higher-than-average percentage of seniors and, with that, pre-disaster unemployment rate four times higher than the national average. In addition, many of those who lost their homes live on limited incomes and face the prospect of relocating or rebuilding without Federal assistance or adequate insurance coverage.

The Caldor Fire tragically burned Grizzly Flats and surrounding wildland habitats across many acres of private and public lands. Once the Caldor Fire reached catastrophic size, the scope of

damage caused by the fire was beyond anything residents of El Dorado County could have ever imagined. The Caldor Fire was a nightmare that had tremendous mental and physical impact on our county and will be remembered for generations to come.

Residents like disabled veteran R.W. MacNeil provide stories about leaving their pets behind during the urgency of sudden evacuation in expectation that the fire would be kept under control.

In Grizzly Flats, few residents had warning to gather belongings before they were told to evacuate immediately. As a result, many residents were not able to gather very important paperwork or belongings and in some cases were forced to leave livestock and pets behind.

One large family reported fitting nearly a dozen people in a single vehicle and driving away as their home was engulfed in flames. Many residents continue to live in small trailers and RVs on their properties.

Forest management was reduced over the decades in the Sierra Nevada region due to a regulated decrease in logging activity. We should have continued to manage our forests like we manage our gardens.

The Trestle Project was early on identified by the U.S. Forest Service as a potential wildfire threat in the community of Grizzly Flats. The Trestle Project was a fuel-reduction effort started in 2014 and was supposed to be completed by 2021. Though a proposed critical fire break, only 14 percent of the 20,450-acre Trestle Project was ever completed, which could have saved the town of Grizzly Flats.

The Caldor Fire is currently California's 15th-largest recorded wildfire and burned hundreds of homes across 221,835 acres, causing $81 million in damage for Grizzly Flats alone, including Grizzly Flats' CSD utility infrastructure and lost revenue. Areas like the Tahoe Basin, Pollock Pines, or along Highway 50 were spared greater destruction by the Caldor Fire thanks to good forest management.

The survivors of Grizzly Flats impacted by the Caldor Fire look back on the devastation as a horrific event that changed their way of life. The natural beauty of this region that was impacted by the Caldor Fire is a loss for decades.

The county of El Dorado continues to do everything within its power to recover from the Caldor Fire, including helping communities and wildland habitats. We continue to rebuild Grizzly Flats, including residential housing, infrastructure repairs, roads, water, and basic services. The El Dorado County government is grateful and appreciates any assistance that may be offered to the residents of Grizzly Flats.

I have a fire map behind me. If you look at this map, you can see the last three fires. We have the King Fire, then the Caldor Fire, and the Mosquito Fire. The Mosquito Fire had a project that was called the Volcan Project and that was never completed, but they are working on it now after the fire went through and destroyed some homes in Volcanoville.

If you look at all the green dots here, this dates back to 1915. Back then they put these fires out. It was residents, volunteers,

people that worked at the mills. Loggers put these fires out. It is a great thing is what it is.

We need to get back to that. We need to have more logging and good forest management.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Turnboo follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GEORGE TURNBOO, SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT II, COUNTY OF EL DORADO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Greetings,

I, George Turnboo, as District 2 Supervisor and 8th generation resident in the County of El Dorado, have never witnessed destruction at such a great magnitude as the Caldor Fire of 2021. The massive wildfire destroyed the community of Grizzly Flats, CA, and left most people homeless with a lost sense of community whose destruction included the only school, post office, church, water infrastructure and hundreds of homes. Compounding these losses, Grizzly Flats has a higher-than-average percentage of seniors, and with pre-disaster unemployment rate four times higher than the national rate. In addition, many of those who lost their homes live on limited incomes and face the prospect of relocating or rebuilding without Federal assistance or adequate insurance coverage. The Caldor Fire tragically burned Grizzly Flats and surrounding wildland habitats, across many acres of private and public lands. Once the Caldor Fire had reached catastrophic size, the scope of damage caused by the fire was beyond anything residents of El Dorado County could have ever imagined. The Caldor Fire was a nightmare that had a tremendous mental and physical impact on our County and will be remembered for generations to come.

Residents like disabled veteran R.W. MacNeil provide stories about leaving their pets behind due to the urgency of sudden evacuation and the expectation that the fire would be kept under control. In Grizzly Flats, few residents had warning to gather belongings before they were told to evacuate immediately. As a result, many residents were not able to gather very important paperwork or belongings, and in some cases were forced to leave livestock and pets behind. One large family reported fitting nearly a dozen people into a single vehicle and driving away as their home was engulfed in flames. Many residents continue to live in small trailers or RVs on their properties.

Forest management was reduced over the decades in the Sierra Nevada region, due to a regulated decrease in logging activity. We should have and continue to manage our forest like we manage our gardens. The Trestle Project was early on identified by the US Forest Service as a potential wildfire threat to the community of Grizzly Flats. The Trestle Project was a fuel reduction effort started in 2014 and was supposed to be completed by 2021. Though a proposed critical fire break, only 14% of the 20,453-acre Trestle Project was ever completed, which could have saved Grizzly Flats. The Caldor Fire is currently California's 15th largest recorded wildfire and burned hundreds of homes across 221,835 acres causing $81,846,798 in damage for Grizzly Flats alone, including Grizzly Flats CSD utility infrastructure and lost revenue. Areas like the Tahoe Basin, Pollock Pines or along Highway 50 were spared greater destruction by the Caldor Fire thanks to good forest management.

The survivors of Grizzly Flats, impacted by the Caldor Fire, look back on the devastation as a horrific event that changed their way of life. The natural beauty of the region that was impacted by the Caldor Fire is lost for decades. The County of El Dorado continues to do everything within its power to recover from the Caldor Fire, including helping communities and wildland habitats. We continue to rebuild Grizzly Flats including residential housing, infrastructure repairs, roads, water, and basic services. El Dorado County Government is grateful and appreciates any assistance that may be offered to the Grizzly Flats residents.

*****

ATTACHMENTS

Grizzly Letters

My name is Tobe Magidson, a resident of Grizzly Flats, California. I would like to explain the devastation we have experienced as a family and as a community. I worked for 35 years straight to build my family their little slice of the American pie. I struggled through life since I was born in Oakland, California. I learned early that to survive I had to fight through adversity and struggles to rise above the poverty level we were accustomed to living in as a child. To do so was a blessing from God and a testament to American fortitude. I'm a single dad who fights so hard every day to provide a better future for my children and family.

On that horrible tragic hot august night, I walked outside around 11:30 after an exhausting day of being battered in just trying to save our homes and property. I knew at that moment we were awaiting an inevitable date with hell. This fire was something out of the Book of Revelations. It was a biblical destruction to this once beautiful thriving mountain community. As I gazed up into the smoky night sky, I had silver dollar sized ashes raining down from above on me. I prayed to God that He would vanquish this firestorm and then started my reluctant evacuation process. I realized at that moment that nothing I could do would be able to control this beast from hell. I loaded up remaining animals, my dog and my family and started down the easement road to the evacuation point at the bottom of our mountain.

From 12 miles away from home, we watched as the mountain began to glow so bright in the night sky that it was apocalyptic. The pain we felt sitting at the base of that mountain, watching our beloved community and everything we worked so hard for disappear in a matter of a few hours' time, was like nothing we have ever experienced before. We just finished building our house and finally were able to move in, just to have it ripped away in one night. I can't begin to explain the great loss this has caused our family and many more families like ours.

The Magidson Family

Grizzly Letters

My grandmother bought the land I was at in the 1950s, hoping to retire there. The house dated to 1910. Just like my neighbor Larry's place. The old house across from his, where we used to stay when I was a kid, dated back to 1874. I mention this to counter that some people say, that things burn down all the time out here in the hills. Obviously, they don't, or those old wooden houses wouldn't have been there. Although they are gone now.

Some people seem to think that us folks in Grizzly Flats were well off, and these homes were 2nd houses. That's anything but true. While there are a few that are doing well, most of us are basically poor. That's why people come here. It's the cheapest housing around. That's why 40 % of us didn't have homeowners' insurance. Not that we wouldn't have liked to have it. I used to have it, but had to give it up. I'm 73, living on nothing but Social Security. To give you an idea, my cousin is paying $4,000/year for his insurance. But, he's got a great pension from USPS, so he can afford it. …

For that matter, we Grizzly people are already fed up with the government. If you don't know, the Caldor Fire was not handled well by the federal and state agencies out here. Even '60 Minutes' carried the story of how the agencies did not work well together. And the last minute recorded message we got to evacuate, that most of us did not take very seriously. We could not believe they would let the middle of town, the old part, burn. They brag about how they got all the people out, but not all the animals. Some animals burned alive horribly. I still cry everyday over the pets I lost.

R.W. MacNeil

Grizzly Letters

Melissa White and her family of eight enjoyed their home in Grizzly Flats, because the rural atmosphere provided a better setting for her family. She heard about the Caldor Fire on August 14th, but since there were no evacuation notices, she didn't expect fire in her area. On August 16th, the Caldor Fire was approximately four miles from her home, she could hear an audible roaring from the fire and ash was falling on her property like snow. After Melissa and her family started packing for evacuation, fire crews appeared in her community informing residents that they had 15 minutes to evacuate.

On August 17th, an independent reporter on social media was showing Grizzly Flats devastation. After asking the reporter to check on their home, Melissa and her family saw that their home had burned down. ***They lost everything.*** There was too little time to save many belongings before the fire consumed everything else that they owned. Melissa worked locally in Grizzly Flats, and the place she worked burned down too, leaving her without a job. Her husband's job was also lost. Though they did receive assistance from family, they were asked to leave the hotel they were staying at to make space for firefighters and a wedding party. They had to stay with family in Antioch temporarily, which is quite a distance away. Since that point, Melissa and her family of 8 have not been able to find a stable life.

Eventually, Melissa and her family of 8 were able to get an RV but due to the small size, three family members simply moved away to stay with other family, leaving Melissa with a family of 5 instead of 8. In the process of moving around, the family pet dog died. While they did have insurance, the insurance company made excuses why they (the insurance company) would not reimburse the full cost of the home. Expenses during the Caldor Fire evacuation period drained Melissa and her family of their resources. With no income, and no home, Melissa has had to consider moving out of the state while she and her family rebuild their home and lives.

Melissa White

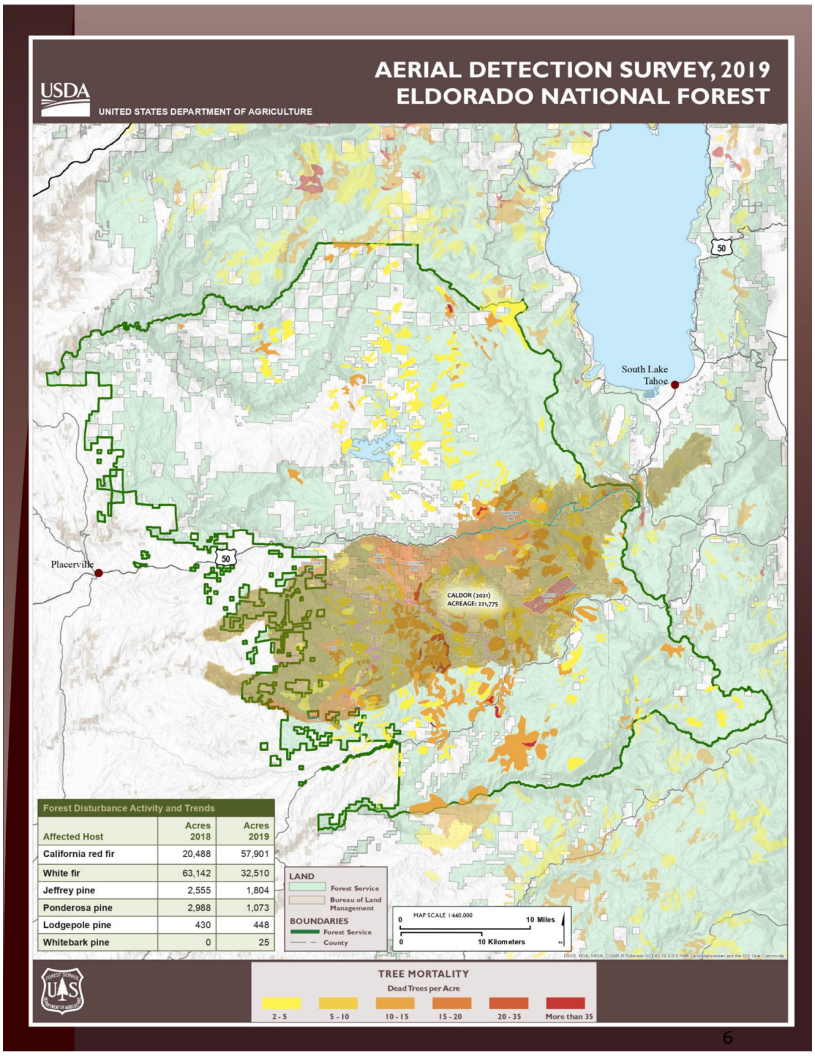
Grizzly Letters

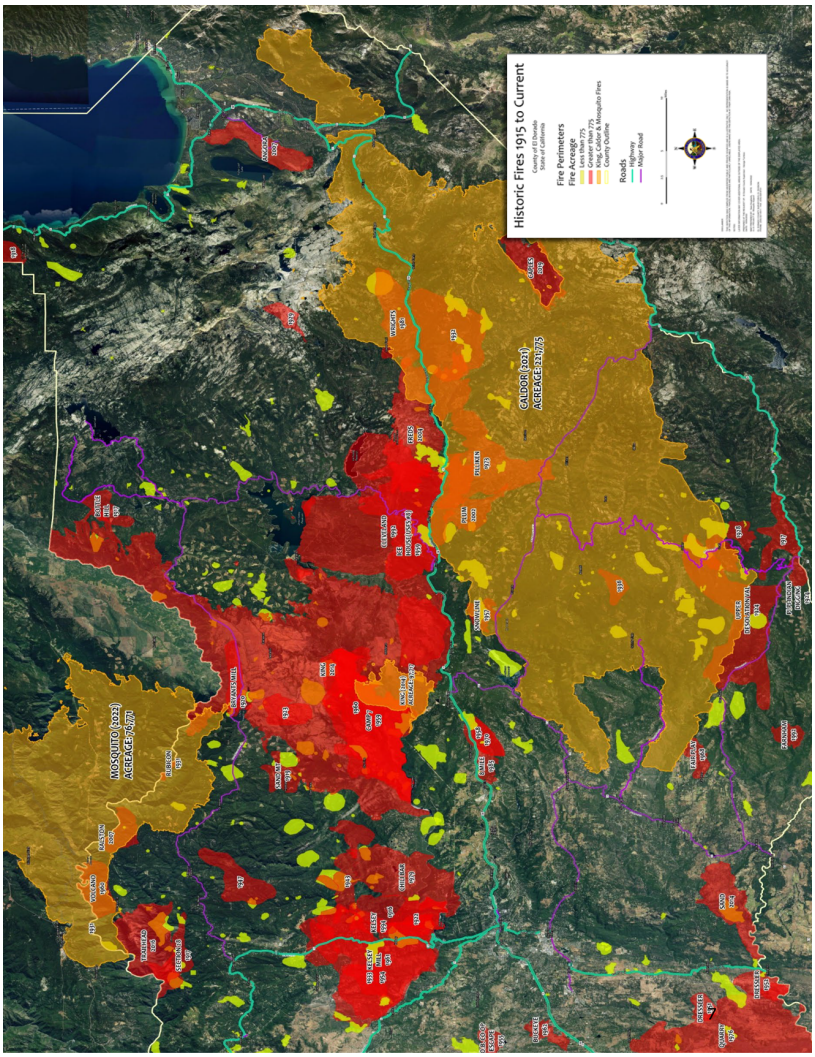
Candance Flaming watched the Caldor Fire begin from her family ranch, the Tyler Ranch. At first, it seemed that no one knew where the fire was, but everyone could see the smoke and reports suggested the fire was only 40 acres. When fire crews started appearing, the fire crews were simply checking on the fire but not responding, which worried Candance because she couldn't see any visible fire support. She noted that an observation helicopter flew over her residence five times. The Tyler Ranch is partially timber lands, registered fire swath, and had 9 family owned homes and antiques from the early 1900's. Candance would later find out that there were only 67 fire personnel in Grizzly Flats to deal with the Caldor Fire, despite the Tyler Ranch being within a registered fire swath and being some distance from Grizzly Flats.

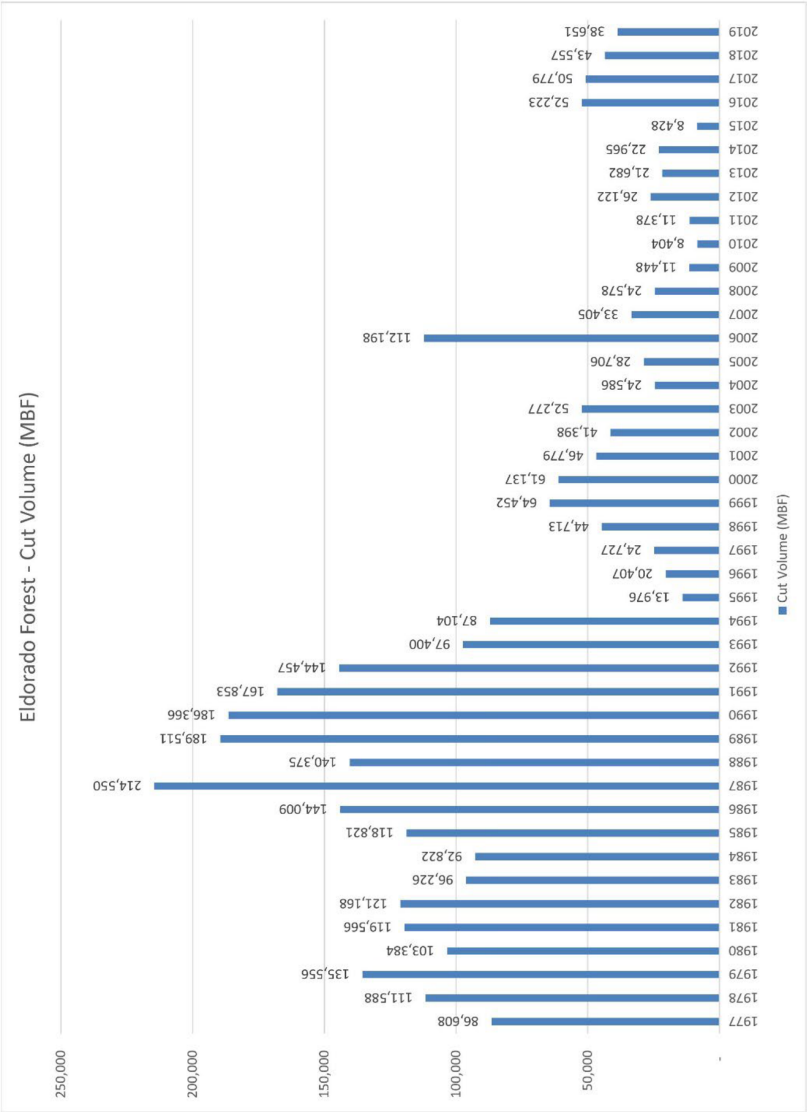
On August 16th, the fire was beyond 700 acres, but still Candance saw no fire response as it was moving closer and closer towards her historic home originally built in 1854. Realizing the importance of the situation, Candance and her family began packing trailers and everything they could. Through the raining ash and debris, their preparations for evacuation were cut short when homes started exploding around them. Candance and her family immediately evacuated Tyler Ranch.

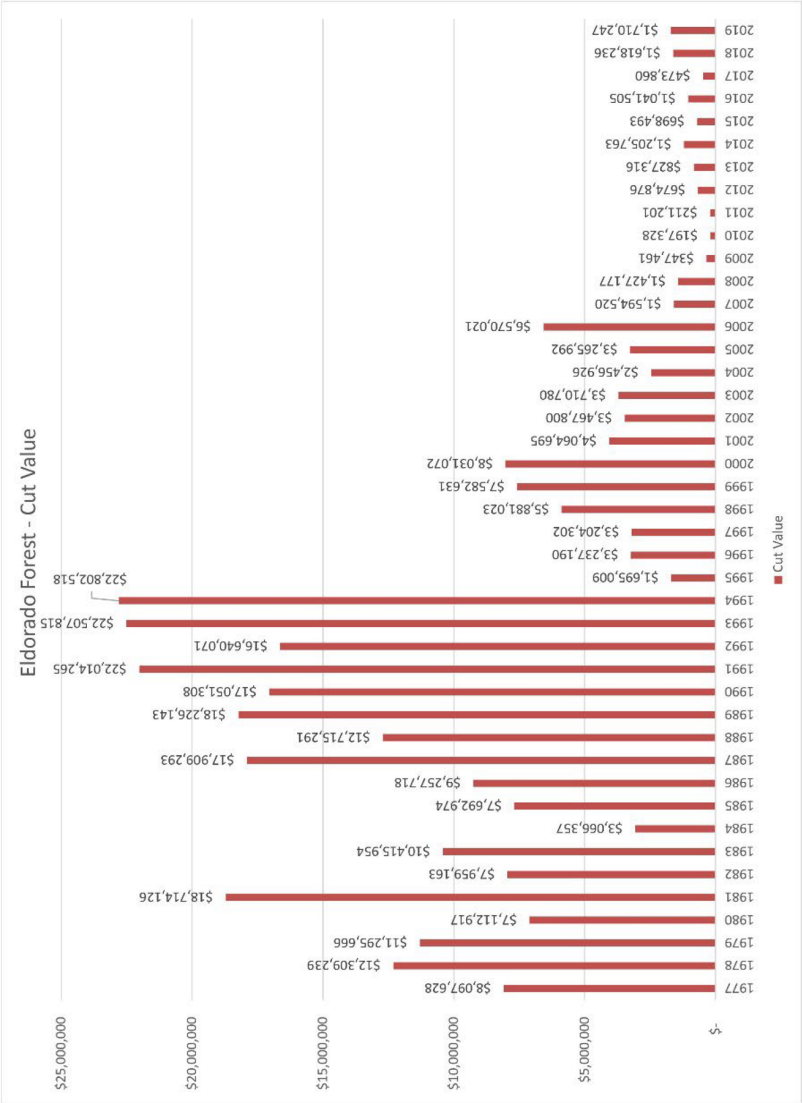
Candance first evacuated to Pleasant Valley, which was evacuated the next day, forcing Candance to move again. She had to rely on family for immediate help, by parking her RV in the family member's front yard. She would later learn that her family lost 7 homes on Tyler Ranch. Her home had insurance, but the payout was minimal and not enough to rebuild. Candance Fleming has nothing left now, and she lives in an RV that is parked in a front yard.

Candance Flaming at Tyler Ranch


USDA
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AERIAL DETECTION SURVEY, 2019
ELDORADO NATIONAL FOREST
South Lake Tahoe
Placerville
50
CALDOR (2021) ACREAGE: 221,775
Forest Disturbance Activity and Trends
Affected Host | Acres 2018 | Acres 2019
California red fir | 20,488 | 57,901
White fir | 63,142 | 32,510
Jeffrey pine | 2,555 | 1,804
Ponderosa pine | 2,988 | 1,073
Lodgepole pine | 430 | 448
Whitebark pine | 0 | 25
LAND
Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
BOUNDARIES
Forest Service
County
MAP SCALE 1:440,000
10 Miles
10 Kilometers
TREE MORTALITY
Dead Trees per Acre
2 - 5
5 - 10
10 - 15
15 - 20
20 - 35
More than 35


Historic Fires 1915 to Current
County of El Dorado
State of California
Fire Perimeters
Fire Acreage
Greater than 275
Between 100 and 275
Mosquito Fire
Caldor Fire
County Outline
Roads
Highway
Major Road
CALDOR (2021)
ACREAGE: 221,775
MOSQUITO (2022)
ACREAGE: 76,677


Eldorado Forest - Cut Volume (MBF)
Cut Volume (MBF)
250,000
200,000
150,000
100,000
50,000
1977 86,608
1978 111,588
1979 135,556
1980 103,384
1981 119,566
1982 121,168
1983 96,226
1984 92,822
1985 118,821
1986 144,009
1987 214,550
1988 140,375
1989 189,511
1990 186,366
1991 167,853
1992 144,457
1993 97,400
1994 87,104
1995 13,976
1996 20,407
1997 24,727
1998 44,713
1999 64,452
2000 61,137
2001 46,779
2002 41,398
2003 52,277
2004 24,586
2005 28,706
2006 112,198
2007 33,405
2008 24,578
2009 11,448
2010 8,404
2011 11,378
2012 26,122
2013 21,682
2014 22,965
2015 8,428
2016 52,223
2017 50,779
2018 43,557
2019 38,651


Eldorado Forest - Cut Value
Cut Value
$25,000,000
$20,000,000
$15,000,000
$10,000,000
$5,000,000
$-
1977 $8,097,628
1978 $12,309,239
1979 $11,295,666
1980 $7,112,917
1981 $18,714,126
1982 $7,959,163
1983 $10,415,954
1984 $3,066,357
1985 $7,692,974
1986 $9,257,718
1987 $17,909,293
1988 $12,715,291
1989 $18,226,143
1990 $17,051,308
1991 $22,014,265
1992 $16,640,071
1993 $22,507,815
1994 $22,802,518
1995 $1,695,009
1996 $3,237,190
1997 $3,204,302
1998 $5,881,023
1999 $7,582,631
2000 $8,031,072
2001 $4,064,695
2002 $3,467,800
2003 $3,710,780
2004 $2,456,926
2005 $3,265,992
2006 $6,570,021
2007 $1,594,520
2008 $1,427,177
2009 $347,461
2010 $197,328
2011 $211,201
2012 $674,876
2013 $827,316
2014 $1,205,763
2015 $698,493
2016 $1,041,505
2017 $473,860
2018 $1,618,236
2019 $1,710,247

TOM McCLINTOCK
4TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

2312 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE: 202-225-2511

2200A DOUGLAS BLVD, SUITE 240
ROSEVILLE, CA 95661
PHONE: 916-786-5560

HTTPS://MCCLINTOCK.HOUSE.GOV/

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–0504

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP
RANKING MEMBER

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CONSTITUTION, CIVIL LIBERTIES,
AND CIVIL RIGHTS

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

November 19, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to call upon you to fulfill the solemn promise that you made to the victims of the Caldor Fire when you visited the scene on September 13th and promised to help them in the aftermath. This fire is the 15th largest and 16th most destructive fire in the history of California. It literally wiped out the Gold Rush-era town of Grizzly Flats and destroyed nearly 800 homes.

On that occasion, when officials from El Dorado County and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) apprised you of the need to assist these displaced families, you said, "we're going to take care of them…there's a lot that we can do, and it starts off being a federal responsibility, in my view."

To fulfill this pledge, it is imperative that you reverse the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) denial of the Governor's appeal for Individual Assistance for the victims of the Caldor Fire. As I noted in my letters to you of September 17th and November 4th, the denial of Individual Assistance, if allowed to stand, will have devastating consequences on survivors whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed.

The FEMA denial is a stunning double standard when viewed next to assistance granted in other fires of far less impact. For example, Cal OES identified nine other Individual Assistance approvals in 2021, which cumulatively had fewer homes destroyed than those destroyed by the Caldor Fire alone.

Survivors hoping to rebuild their homes face an insurance deficit of $200,000 or more. Many survivors are uninsured, and nearly all of them are underinsured due to the severity of recent wildfire seasons. Survivors who were able to remain on their properties still lack access to potable water.

Moreover, residents of Grizzly Flats are disproportionately low-income, elderly, and socioeconomically vulnerable. Those who work or own businesses in the region were shut out of work for weeks as the fire blazed, and the regional economy will continue to suffer if survivors are not able to rebuild. Critical infrastructure has been either damaged or completely destroyed, including schools, fire stations, and the Grizzly Flats Post Office. While local officials, residents, and organizations are doing everything in their capacity to provide support to one another and rebuild, they will not be able to recover without the federal assistance that they desperately need and deserve.

Last year, when FEMA denied the Governor's request for Individual Assistance for the Creek Fire in Fresno and Madera Counties, President Trump immediately reversed the decision and granted Individual Assistance.

You made a promise to the victims of the Caldor Fire, and now is the time to fulfill it by taking the same action.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Tom McClintock

United States Senate

September 6, 2022

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Criswell,

We write to inquire about FEMA's Individual Assistance approval process and to request any updates you can provide on changing the 2019 rule. When you appeared before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on June 22, 2022, you testified that FEMA was reevaluating the criteria for FEMA Individual Assistance, and you offered to provide an update on the status of this analysis.

As you know, FEMA issued a Major Disaster Declaration for the Caldor Fire, which devastated the town of Grizzly Flats, California. Nearly 222,000 acres were burned in 69 days, and more than 1,000 structures, including 782 homes, were destroyed. However, despite the Caldor Fire destroying more homes than nine other disasters in 2021 combined, California's requests for FEMA Individual Assistance have been repeatedly denied.

It is our understanding that this denial can be traced back to a rule FEMA established in 2019 to consider a state's total resources when determining whether to provide disaster assistance for individuals. California's Office of Emergency Services expressed its concerns with this rule during the comment period, including that it would leave survivors without much-needed aid and discriminate against large states, like California, that may need to provide state resources for numerous disasters simultaneously.

As you know, California and other Western states continue to face increasingly dangerous and extreme fire seasons. We appreciate your commitment to improving the FEMA Individual Assistance process, and we look forward to hearing the status of your review and working with you to provide more equitable federal disaster assistance for all survivors.

Sincerely,

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

COUNTY OF EL DORADO
Board of Supervisors

330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 621-5652
(530) 622-3645 Fax

GEORGE TURNBOO
SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT II

Honorable Representative,

I would like to inform you about a tragic situation facing the residents of Grizzly Flats, CA. The Caldor Fire was the largest fire in El Dorado County history, and one of the largest wildfires in California history. The Caldor Fire decimated several communities, but the most severely impacted was the community of Grizzly Flats. Representatives at all levels of government have reached out to FEMA for Individual Assistance for the victims who suffered tremendous losses by no fault of their own. FEMA denied Individual Assistance for El Dorado County. When President Biden visited California to discuss the Caldor Fire, he promised to help the residents of Grizzly Flats, but since that time, FEMA consistently denies Individual Assistance to the victimized residents. President Biden could authorize the FEMA Individual Assistance to Caldor Fire victims and led residents to believe that he would.

Please watch the YouTube video below that was created by El Dorado County to encourage President Biden to authorize FEMA Individual Assistance to victims of the Caldor Fire. We appreciate any response, recognition and support you can offer. I can be reached by email at bostwo@edcgov.us, by phone at (530) 621-5105.

Caldor Fire Survivors Need Individual Assistance!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJz_Zn-pnD0

Thank you for your consideration,

- George Turnboo

El Dorado County District 2 Supervisor
bostwo@edcgov.us
(530) 621-5105

COUNTY OF EL DORADO
Board of Supervisors

330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 621-5652
(530) 622-3645 Fax

GEORGE TURNBOO
SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT II

Re: Support for the Grizzly Flats Community Services District (GFCSD) Congressionally Directed Funding Request - $7 million

Dear Honorable Senator Feinstein,

I am writing to express my support for Grizzly Flats Community Services District (GFCSD) request for $7 million dollars in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Congressionally Directed Energy and Water Funding for the Eagle Ditch Raw Water Main Replacement project.

The Eagle Ditch raw water pipeline provides flows for the entire community of Grizzly Flats. The Eagle Ditch is one of the most important water infrastructure components that was affected by the Caldor Fire. The pipeline needs to be hardened and replace to ensure continued reliable water to be made available to residents of Grizzly Flats.

The proposed project would replace three miles of plastic pipeline with sturdier ductile iron pipeline to both of GFCSD's diversions. The benefit would be for the entire community of Grizzly Flats by protecting the water supply's main sources from fire related impacts, such as erosion or falling trees. GFCSD sustained many leaks and breaks since the Caldor Fire damaged infrastructure in 2021. Breaks and leaks allow debris to divert into raw water reservoirs, thereby disrupting flows and reducing water quality. Winter operations usually require snow removal and hardened ground surface, which make some repair operations nearly impossible. The pipeline runs deep through USDA Forest Service lands, so hardening this critical infrastructure will allow the community to build back better after the Caldor Fire.

Nearly a year and a half after the Caldor Fire burned through 221,835 acres in El Dorado County and devastated 440 of the 646 homes in the community of Grizzly Flats, insurance issues and lacking FEMA Individual Assistance continue to stand in the way of residents who lost everything and struggle to rebuild. The fire destroyed the local Church, Post Office, Elementary School, Fire Station, and many other infrastructure components. Despite all that, the residents rely on GFCSD to remain resilient, resourceful, and available.

On behalf of my constituents, I want to thank you for your continued efforts to advocate for the federal assistance that the Grizzly Flats community needs and deserves. I strongly support the GFCSD's proposed project and ask that you prioritize their request for Congressionally Directed Funding. If you have further questions, please contact us at bostwo@edcgov.us or by phone at (530) 621-5651.

Sincerely,

George Turnboo
District 2 Supervisor
County of El Dorado

COUNTY OF EL DORADO
Board of Supervisors

330 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 621-5652
(530) 622-3645 Fax

GEORGE TURNBOO
SUPERVISOR, DISTRICT II

March 8, 2023

The Honorable Alex Padilla
U.S. Senator for California
B03 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Mr. Padilla:

We are aware that the Grizzly Flats Community Services District (GFCSD) is submitting a FY 24 Energy and Water funding request for the Eagle Ditch Raw Water Main Replacement project.

The Eagle Ditch raw water pipeline is the source water supply for the entire community of Grizzly Flats and is one of Grizzly Flats Community Services District's most critical facilities. The pipeline needs to be hardened and replaced in the aftermath of the Caldor Fire to ensure reliable and continued water supply to its customers.

The proposed project would replace the existing 3-mile plastic pipeline with a more robust Ductile Iron Pipe material to both of GFCSD's diversions. This project would benefit the entire community of Grizzly Flats and would protect the water supply's 2 sources against future fire related impacts such as erosion or damage from fallen trees. The District has had significant number of breaks and leaks in the existing pipeline since the fire in August 2021. These breaks have interrupted water flow and allowed debris to divert into the raw water reservoir, impacting the water quality. Disruption during the winter months makes it especially difficult to repair the pipeline due to heavy snow load on the ground where the pipeline is located deep in the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service lands. Hardening this critical pipeline will ensure more reliable and continuous service to the District's customers, and better allow the community to recover and rebuild from the Caldor Fire's devastation.

The El Dorado County District 2 Supervisor very much supports this proposed project as it will help protect the residents of the Grizzly Flats community and surrounding areas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

George Turnboo
District 2 Supervisor
County of El Dorado

GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

MARK S. GHILARDUCCI
DIRECTOR

Cal OES
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

October 25, 2021

Mr. David Bibo, Acting Associate Administrator
Office of Response and Recovery
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Through: Mr. Robert J. Fenton, Jr., Regional Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region IX
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
1111 Broadway, Suite 1200
Oakland, California 94607-4052

Subject: Appeal of Denial for Individuals and Households Program for El Dorado County

Dear Mr. Fenton:

On October 8, 2021, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) denied California's request for Individual Assistance for the Caldor Fire that began in El Dorado County on August 14, 2021. Specifically, FEMA stated that "the impact to the individuals and households from this event was not of such severity and magnitude to warrant the designation of Individual Assistance." California disagrees with this determination. Looking at the totality of the circumstances, beyond simply the number of homes destroyed and county-level insurance policies in effect, Individual Assistance is warranted and necessary for the impacted communities and disaster survivors to fully recover.

Under the provisions of Section 401 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act) and implemented by 44 Code of Federal Regulations section 206.46, I am appealing this denial of Individual Assistance. I request that you approve the Individuals and Households Program, including Disaster Case Management, Crisis Counseling, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, and Disaster Legal Services for El Dorado County.

On September 12, 2021, the President declared a major disaster to exist in El Dorado County due to the damage resulting from the Caldor Fire, which burned 221,835 acres before full containment on October 21, 2021. Catastrophic destruction occurred as more than 1,000 structures were consumed by the Caldor Fire, including an immense concentration of homes in Grizzly Flats— one of the most poverty-challenged area in the county. The near-total devastation of this community, including destruction of its

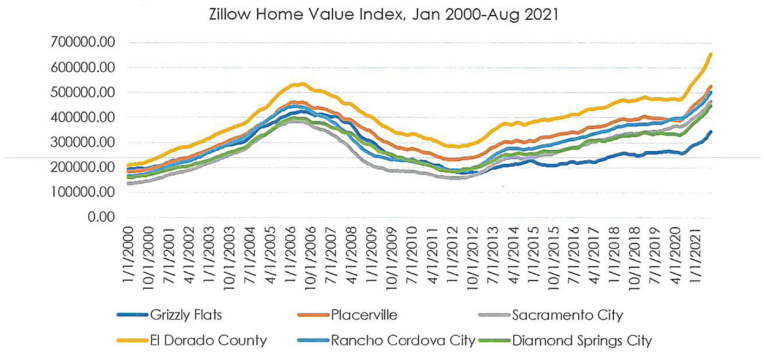
only school, post office, and water system, necessitates partnership and action from all levels of government to ensure survivors can recover, rebuild, and return to normalcy.

UNINSURED HOME AND PERSONAL PROPERTY LOSSES

Joint Individual Assistance Preliminary Damage assessments confirmed 785 destroyed homes, including 594 primary residences, and an additional two homes with major damage, principally within the Grizzly Flats area of El Dorado County. Some survivors have found temporary shelter by using recreational vehicles. However, these temporary shelters are far removed from their pre-disaster address due to limited availability in campgrounds and parks. This displacement placed additional burdens on the survivors due to increased costs for gas from extended commutes for work, school, and family. Renters face even more challenges and displacement due to the housing shortage and nonexistent availability of nearby rental resources, compounding the challenges of their recovery.

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) extensively researched and analyzed home value data, insurance rates, and rebuild costs for Grizzly Flats and the surrounding communities with strong economic ties to the area. The results demonstrate the overwhelming disparity in home insurance coverage of the survivors of the Caldor Fire and their ability to rebuild or relocate without federal assistance. Ultimately, survivors face a set of options that all result in a significant loss due to underinsurance.

Zillow Home Value Index data, shown in the chart below, highlights a widening gap in home values in recent years between Grizzly Flats, El Dorado County as a whole, and other nearby communities. As insurance policies are tied to the valuation of the residence, this gap in home value is directly correlated to survivors having drastically insufficient coverage to remain in El Dorado County. If survivors are unable to rebuild or relocate nearby, the recovery of Grizzly Flats remains bleak.



As discussed in the September 17, 2021 request, *Supplemental Preliminary Damage Assessment Data and Request to add Individual Assistance to FEMA-4619-DR-CA, California Caldor Fire*, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) provided the average residential construction costs in El Dorado County. The estimated rebuild costs for a 1,500 square foot home in Grizzly Flats is calculated below using a $362 per square foot cost for slab on grade and a $385 per square foot cost for pier and beam, according to HCD data. Survivors hoping to return to their community and rebuild face insurance deficits of approximately $200,000—underscoring the widespread underinsurance rate.

Individuals and households that choose to purchase a home nearby experience similar challenges due to underinsurance. Here, survivors encounter insurance deficits ranging from $122,000 to $310,000. When viewed comprehensively with the insurance value of the destroyed residences compared with the average rebuild costs and home values in surrounding areas, the deficit in insurance coverage is astounding. Survivors of the Caldor Fire must overcome significant financial hurdles due to this disparity in insurance coverage, which necessitates federal assistance to augment their recovery.

Home Insurance Deficit					
	Rebuild in Grizzly Flats		**Purchase a Home**		
	Slab on Grade	**Pier and Beam**	**El Dorado County**	**Placerville**	**Sacramento**
Cost	$543,000	$577,500	$655,821	$528,271	$466,961
Full Insurance Value	$345,014	$345,014	$345,014	$345,014	$345,014
Deficit	**$197,986**	**$232,486**	**$310,000**	**$183,257**	**$121,947**
Source	*HCD*	*HCD*	*Zillow*	*Zillow*	*Zillow*

El Dorado County officials have also expressed that due to the lower income levels of this community, many survivors were uninsured and essentially all are underinsured—further supported by the data shown above. Residents in fire prone areas of California have continually struggled with homeowner's insurance coverage as companies increase premiums or cancel policies altogether. Following the devastating 2018 wildfire season, insurance policy cancellations rose by 61 percent, with the state's 10 most fire-prone counties experiencing a 203 percent increase,[1] demonstrating the increasing challenges homeowners face in the Wildland Urban Interface.

IMPACT TO COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Nearly two months after the Caldor Fire, all areas of the Grizzly Flats Community Services District (GFCSD) water system remain unsafe for consumption. GFCSD provides water service to approximately 1,220 parcels. At least 418 of those parcels were destroyed by the Caldor Fire, severely affecting the district's ability to recover and maintain infrastructure as this will impact their revenue and budget. GFCSD water storage and

[1] "Can 'fire hardening' solve California's home insurance crisis?" CalMatters, December 7, 2020. https://calmatters.org/environment/california-wildfires/2020/12/homeowners-insurers-fire-science/

distribution infrastructure were heavily damaged by the fire, along with surface collection and diversion systems. The State Water Resources Control Board created a water quality testing program for GFCSD; however, service line leaks must be repaired before sampling, and GFCSD customers remain under a "do not drink – do not boil" water advisory.

The El Dorado Irrigation District, which serves over 130,000 residents, also relied on surface water collection in the area of the Caldor Fire burn scar. The district had a diversion facility and miles of a wooden flume conveyance system destroyed in the fire which were of critical importance for the supply of one-third of the district's water supply. Thus, the Caldor Fire survivors that were able to remain on their properties still do not have access to safe, potable water through the traditional means.

Highway 50 remained closed for 32 days during the height of the Caldor Fire, significantly disrupting commerce and tourism in the region. As a critical west-east corridor from the Bay Area to Lake Tahoe, the California Department of Transportation estimated the daily cost in commerce of the closure to be $238,000 or $7.6 million over the course of the incident. Highways 88 and 89 also had multiple closures in place, adding to the overall transportation and commerce impacts to the Trans-Sierra highway system and its communities.

As the Caldor Fire blazed across El Dorado County, many school districts evacuated, canceled school, or postponed the start of school for weeks due to the fire. Sadly, Walt Tyler Elementary School in the Pioneer Union School District, which served the Grizzly Flats community, was destroyed, eliminating a cornerstone of the community, and leaving 34 students without a school. The 34 students have been temporarily relocated to the Pioneer Elementary School, which is at least a 45-minute drive one-way from Grizzly Flats, further burdening the surviving families. According to data from the 2019-2020 school year, over 64 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced-priced meals, underscoring the limited economic resources of families in Grizzly Flats.

Critical community services, such as the Grizzly Flats Forest Service Fire Station, Pioneer Fire Department Station 35, and the Grizzly Flats Post Office were also destroyed in the blaze. However, with Public Assistance programs approved for FEMA-4619-DR-CA, repair and restoration of critical infrastructure can ultimately occur, although residents may not be financially able to return without Individual Assistance. Thus, while Walt Tyler Elementary School can eventually be rebuilt, many families will continue to seek alternate living arrangements outside of the community and may never return. Moreover, with the school located on United States Forest Service property, complications are expected to arise with debris removal and will further delay reconstruction and the return of the community. The viability of Grizzly Flats demands the full support of federal, state, local, and private nonprofit programs to reinforce its recovery efforts and secure its future as a community in the Sierra foothills.

DISASTER RELATED UNEMPLOYMENT

Commercial impacts due to the closures of critical transportation corridors, state and federal parks and forests, and other leisure sites have long-term economic implications

for the area. Disruptions and damages to agricultural, logging, and recreational industries have also affected numerous low-wage sectors, which traditionally face additional challenges when recovering from a disaster. The widespread economic impacts from the Caldor Fire throughout El Dorado County illustrate a need for Disaster Unemployment Assistance for survivors to bolster their recovery.

The tourism industry accounts for more than 60 percent of the Lake Tahoe Basin's $5 billion regional economic output, which was severely impacted due to the Caldor Fire. Widespread smoke and ash inundated the region far before encroachment of the actual fire that ultimately triggered mandatory evacuation orders. Then, as the Caldor Fire raced toward South Lake Tahoe, more than 53,000 residents received notice to flee to safety. As businesses shuttered their doors, low-wage sector employees and small business owners found themselves without income during peak summer tourist season—Labor Day weekend. The numerous hotels, bed and breakfasts, vacation rentals, and resorts were left empty, and restaurant and grocery store inventory wilted and rotted. Hundreds of businesses throughout El Dorado County were closed for weeks until the valiant efforts of local, state, and federal firefighting personnel tamed the out-of-control blaze.

The regional economy, already depressed by reduced discretionary spending from COVID-19 pandemic challenges for nearly two years, is highly susceptible to economic shocks due to its reliance on tourism. An initial analysis by University of Nevada, Reno researchers estimates at least $50.3 million in lost economic activity in El Dorado County due to the Caldor Fire, which does not include losses in sectors like rental homes or recreation businesses. As United States Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data demonstrates, roughly 43 percent of the employed residents in Grizzly Flats travel more than 50 miles to work, compared to 28 percent in El Dorado County and 15 percent statewide. This data indicates the long-term recovery and viability of Grizzly Flats is at risk as a large share of its employed residents have economic ties outside the immediate community, and therefore, without adequate support, will likely relocate from Grizzly Flats.

Moreover, researchers studied the nationwide impact of California's 2018 wildfire season and estimated the total economic damage of $148.5 billion, or roughly 1.5 percent of California's annual gross domestic product.[2] The assessment of costs included direct (e.g. structure loss), healthcare (e.g. smoke pollution exposure), indirect (e.g. lost hours working), and disruption to supply chains, which exceeded that of any disaster in the United States between the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—other than Hurricane Katrina.[3] Given the disruption to the robust tourism and recreational industries and the lengthy closures of critical transportation corridors, the nationwide economic impacts of the 2021 wildfires will greatly surpass those of the 2018 season. With the impacts from California's wildfires felt across the

[2] "Economic footprint of California wildfires in 2018." Nature Sustainability, December 7, 2020. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-020-00646-7
[3] "How much do wildfires really cost California's economy?" CalMatters, October 11, 2021. https://calmatters.org/economy/2021/10/california-wildfires-economic-impact/

country, it is imperative to provide federal assistance to those that are most in need, particularly in ground zero of the Caldor Fire: Grizzly Flats.

DISASTER IMPACTED POPULATION PROFILE

United States Census Bureau data for Grizzly Flats indicates an elderly population more than double the state and national averages, with triple the percentage of households relying on Social Security income. Grizzly Flats also had a significant pre-disaster unemployment rate more than four times the national rate, which is likely to increase due to the protracted fallout of wildfire impacts across the region.

According to the Social Vulnerability Index, the census tract encompassing Grizzly Flats is more vulnerable than El Dorado County as a whole, ranking in the 37th percentile of all census tracts in the US. Grizzly Flats ranked in the 64th percentile in terms of socioeconomic vulnerability, driven by a high unemployment rate and a relatively high poverty rate, and indicating that only 36 percent of census tracts in the nation are more vulnerable in this category. Ultimately, the survivors of the Caldor Fire face numerous socioeconomic barriers in accessing assistance programs and resources to support their recovery.

Population Demographics					
Area	Population[4]	Elderly (65+)[4]	Persons (<18)[4]	Limited-English Proficient[4]	Language Other than English Spoken at Home[4]
National	324,697,795	15.6%	22.6%	8.4%	21.6%
California	39,283,497	14.0%	23.0%	17.8%	44.2%
El Dorado	188,563	20.5%	20.1%	3.6%	12.2%
Grizzly Flats	1,195	35.5%	17.7%	0.0%	1.4%

Vulnerable Population Demographics						
Area	Below Poverty[4]	Disabled[4]	SSI Recipients[4] (Households)	SNAP Recipients[4] (Households)	Pre-Disaster Unemployment	Electricity-Dependent Medicare Beneficiaries[5]
National	13.4%	12.6%	5.3%	11.7%	5.4%[6]	0.8%
California	13.4%	10.6%	6.1%	8.9%	7.6%[7]	0.5%
El Dorado	8.4%	13.2%	5.1%	5.7%	5.8%[8]	1.0%

[4] "2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates." United States Census Bureau. https://data.census.gov/cedsci/
[5] "Medicare Electricity-Dependent Populations by Geography." United States Department of Health and Human Services. https://empowerprogram.hhs.gov/empowermap
[6] "Employment status of the civilian population, July 2021." United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t01.htm
[7] "California Unemployment Rate, July 2021." United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST060000000000003
[8] "Labor Force and Unemployment Rate for California Counties, July 2021." State of California Employment Development Department. https://data.edd.ca.gov/Labor-Force-and-Unemployment-Rates/Labor-Force-and-Unemployment-Rate-for-California-C/r8rw-9pxx/data

Grizzly Flats	8.7%	20.6%	16.3%	0.0%	21.8%[9]	0.9%

Given the vulnerable populations that comprise the Grizzly Flats community, Individual Assistance programs are necessary to augment recovery efforts in progress by local and state agencies and private nonprofit partners.

RESOURCE AVAILABILITY

California's eight largest wildfires occurred within the last four years. That and a nearly two-year long pandemic have exhausted local, state, and private nonprofit personnel and resources. Despite attempts to maximize assistance through existing programs and resources, FEMA's Individual Assistance is necessary and warranted for the individuals and households that survived the Caldor Fire to strengthen their recovery and facilitate their return to Grizzly Flats, and to fill in gaps where state and local governments cannot. For example, while California administers a State Supplemental Grant Program to provide up to $10,000 to individuals and households, this assistance is only available to those that receive a maximum grant from the FEMA Individuals and Households Program. Thus, a FEMA Individual Assistance declaration is necessary to unlock this state assistance.

Within El Dorado County, there is a lack of available social services, with faith-based organizations, such as the United Methodist Church in Placerville, local foundations and nonprofits providing assistance to a far greater extent than compared to larger metropolitan areas. The United Methodist Church and other faith-based organizations are currently focused on providing assistance to lower income survivors, many of whom are renters without insurance that lost everything in the Caldor Fire. However, this limited assistance leaves survivors with significant unmet needs that can and should be addressed by FEMA's Individual Assistance program. Similarly, on the local foundations and nonprofits side, the El Dorado Foundation is providing rental assistance through direct payments to landlords and has assisted 26 families to date. The Salvation Army and the Tzu Chi Foundation are also providing various forms of financial assistance.

While voluntary and faith-based organization assistance has been critical toward the recovery of survivors of the Caldor Fire, unmet needs, such as affordable housing in the region, remain. Without authorization of FEMA's Individual Assistance programs, survivors face potentially insurmountable challenges due to the limited availability of resources through the faith-based community and the lack of housing options. Survivors are already facing complications when navigating their recovery. FEMA's Disaster Case Management program would be crucial to guide survivors and facilitate their return to their close-knit community in the Sierra foothills. Furthermore, FEMA's Crisis Counseling Program would support and empower survivors that may face the harsh reality of losing the entirety of their possessions and of their displacement from the community that their family has called home for generations.

EQUITY IN DISASTERS

[9] "Labor Force and Unemployment Rate for California Sub-County Areas, July 2021." State of California Employment Development Department. https://data.edd.ca.gov/Labor-Force-and-Unemployment-Rates/Labor-Force-and-Unemployment-Rate-for-California-S/8z4h-2ak6/data

While statewide metrics are bolstered by the economic engines of Los Angeles and San Francisco counties, the story is much different in the Sierra Nevada foothills. El Dorado County ranks 44th out of 58 counties in terms of per capita gross domestic product, further highlighting the limited resources of the County and its residents and the importance of FEMA's evaluation through the lens of the impacted community. The situation in Grizzly Flats is even more dire, as residents there earn far less than their counterparts in the more suburban and affluent areas of El Dorado County. For example, if Grizzly Flats were a county, the median household income of its residents would place it near the bottom, ranking 46th out of all counties.

As President Biden noted in his January 20, 2021 Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, equity is "the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as […] persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality." The socioeconomically disadvantaged residents of Grizzly Flats are emblematic of those underserved communities referred to by the President and deserve the full support of FEMA Individual Assistance.

Cal OES has identified nine other major disaster declarations approved for Individual Assistance in 2021 which, cumulatively, had fewer destroyed homes than those destroyed by the Caldor Fire alone. Just as those events were evaluated on the totality of the impacts, not just the number of destroyed residences, the loss of the entire Grizzly Flats community, and the socioeconomic makeup of the community, should be considered in this appeal. With the destruction of its only school, post office, and water system, and 785 primary and secondary residences, the devastation to this community cannot be overstated. Moreover, according to the Zillow Home Value Index and home insurance deficit previously discussed, the amount of the insurance deficit when purchasing a home in El Dorado County ($310,000) is more than the average Zillow home value in 29 states. As California ranks second in home values nationwide, and with at least 594 households now rendered homeless in El Dorado County due to the Caldor Fire, California respectfully requests FEMA reconsider the decision-making to account for equity in Individual Assistance designations for California.

Further, without an Individual Assistance declaration, FEMA will preclude the community of Grizzly Flats from receiving Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery program funding. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development administers the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery program, which addresses unmet housing needs. This program is only available to communities that have received a FEMA Individual Assistance declaration. Based on allocations from this program to California communities affected by the 2017 and 2018 wildfires with sociodemographic profiles similar to Grizzly Flats, we estimate that this will deprive the community of between $9 and $13 million of federal funds to support rebuilding. This further hinders the vulnerable, disaster-ravaged community's ability to recover from the Caldor Fire.

CONCLUSION
The State of California and its residents have endured an onslaught of record-breaking wildfires in recent years, with more than 2,000 homes destroyed thus far in 2021 and over 5,400 destroyed in 2020. Local, state, and non-profit resources are overwhelmed from the repeated devastating impacts and their long-term economic ramifications. Due to the additional strain on state and local resources as a result of the Caldor Fire—which ignited on federal land—I strongly urge you to consider the information presented in this appeal and approve Individual Assistance for El Dorado County.

The survivors of the Caldor Fire, specifically those in the underserved community of Grizzly Flats, are exceptionally vulnerable and will face insurmountable challenges in their recovery due to the concentration of catastrophic destruction in their community and the widespread impacts to community infrastructure and the regional economy. Further delay of this request will prolong the financial burden on individuals, communities, and the local governments impacted by the Caldor Fire.

I reiterate the certifications and assurances submitted with the request for a major disaster declaration (FEMA-4619-DR), which FEMA approved for Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation statewide on September 12, 2021.

If you require additional information for this request, please contact Ryan Buras, Deputy Director of Recovery, at (916) 845-8767 or Ryan.Buras@caloes.ca.gov.

By affixing my signature hereto, I represent I am duly authorized as the Governor's Authorized Representative to make this request on behalf of the state of California.

Sincerely,

MARK S. GHILARDUCCI
Director, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
Governor's Authorized Representative

For more Caldor Fire information and sources, please visit the link below:
edcgov.us/Government/BOS/DistrictII/Pages/DistrictIIResearch.aspx

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Supervisor Turnboo.

I now recognize Dr. Dave Daley, a fifth-generation rancher from Butte County, California, who is also with the California Cattlemen's Association.

Dr. Daley, you have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DAVE DALEY, CALIFORNIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION, BUTTE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Dr. DALEY. Thank you, Chairman Westerman, thank you, members of the Committee, for having me here today and this opportunity to address this.

It is somewhat bittersweet to do so and you can't do this or live through a catastrophic fire—and I understand your emotion—without it becoming part of your soul. It is part of who you become. And I can't do this today without thinking about the people in Maui today and the number of people who lost their lives. If you haven't been part of a catastrophic wildfire, it is almost hard to fathom and grasp.

I am from Butte County, roughly 250 miles north of here. We were home to the Camp Fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise and killed about a hundred people. A couple of years, later the fire that destroyed my herd and my family legacy was the North Complex, or the Bear Fire, which destroyed the town of Berry Creek, killed 14 more people, and basically burnt everything I have known for my entire life.

It is somewhat bittersweet to sit here. We didn't have the grandeur of the cliffs. But this is what I saw, this is what I grew up with in our national forest. We grazed Forest Service land, mixed with Sierra Pacific, 50 percent private, 50 percent Federal. And it is a moonscape.

As we sit here, I think wouldn't it be interesting to have this hearing in that place, not here, to actually see the impacts to the land, the community, and the people.

Here it is easy to not understand. In Washington, DC it is even further and harder. And I appreciate the Natural Resources Committee being willing to travel and see this land. I am glad you got to see some of it last year.

But because of the fuel loads that we now have, nothing can stop even the controlled wildfire that we would like to have in place. We are at a point now that it is going to be extremely difficult to get the genie back in the bottle, and I am not sure how we will do so.

I testified on behalf of the California Cattlemen's Association, past president of that group. But it is not only my personal experience, state and national levels. I have been chair of the Federal Lands Committee for the National Cattlemen's Association. I am Chair of the Ecosystem and Environment Committee currently for the Public Lands Council. We work with these issues.

You folks, the Forest Service, half of California belongs to the Federal Government. It is easy in California to say, well, it must be Sacramento causing the issues. Not in this case. The lands, the fires are starting on Federal lands and moving into private landscapes. It is a challenge for all of us.

I testified at this Committee in 2021. It was guided by those wounds that I experienced. And, frankly, they come back every time I come to the forest.

I try to go up there now. We were able to take our cattle back this year after a couple of years hiatus thanks to the Forest Service personnel who work with us. It is something my granddaughter will never see in her lifetime, if it recovers, because we have lost that forever.

The Bear Fire is not unique. I think Mr. Turnboo already addressed the amount of acreage that we have lost in the West. That will continue.

What got us here, part of my frustration, very honestly, and this is personal, we spend a lot of time worrying about what got us here rather than what to do next. And we spend a lot of time worrying about, was it climate change, was it management?

But it is irrelevant to those of us who were in it because we aren't correcting it, and I would like more efforts spent on solutions than worrying about whose fault it is. It is everybody's fault. We are there. So, now what are we going to do about it? And I am not sure we have a solution of what we want to do about it at this point.

And, unfortunately, that is difficult to do from 3,000 miles away, and it is difficult to do to achieve consensus with people who have not lived at the firescape and the hellscape that some of us have gone through.

It is error. It is fear of poor outcomes. It is litigation. It is policy development that doesn't work. All of those things have impacted both Federal agencies and Congress. It gets in the way of common sense, and we know it gets in the way of common sense.

So, what we can't do is step in and make corrective actions. I would be hopeful and probably unrealistic to say that the Forest Service within each forest will be given some autonomy to do the right thing, but they aren't because they are governed by Federal policies that are unworkable for most of us.

So, what could we do? Here are a few quick suggestions. And I am talking too long, so I will speak quickly.

Build on successful efforts that replicate those across the landscape. There are many of those that we could do at a larger scale.

Direct agencies to use all available tools that are at their disposal. I am pleased with the Save Our Sequoias Act. It is a small step.

Right now, Yosemite is threatened by fire. If it started this year with a big wind, this would be gone the way my world was destroyed.

We are making some progress in California—and I will wrap this up quickly—but if we can do it here, we have our Air Resources Board recognizing grassland management strategies. Prescribed grazing will support soil carbon sequestration, biodiversity, other ecological improvements.

California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot recently remarked: "Grazing is one of the single best things we can do for wildfire resilience." And that is from Sacramento. So, we need to think about that and where that fits.

Unfortunately, I have lots of ideas and not much time, but they are in the testimony.

The time is now to actually do something. So far, we have had a low fire year. Bipartisan support. The public now is engaged. They know this is not just about forestry. It is about their communities.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thanks for inviting me.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Daley follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. DAVE DALEY, CALIFORNIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Good morning, Chairman Westerman and members of the Committee. Welcome to California. I am Dr. Dave Daley, a native Californian and fifth-generation cattle producer from Butte County just 250 miles from where we sit today.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today as the Committee contemplates conservation of our nation's vast natural resources in the face of growing challenges like catastrophic wildfire and how to address the conditions that precipitate the worst fire outcomes.

My family has spent five generations living, working, and caring for the lands, waters, and wildlife that inhabit this area. We've done this through careful management of our livestock, engagement in our local community, leadership with elected officials, and investment in academic work that guides cutting edge management strategies.

I am a long-time member and past president of the California Cattlemen's Association. The discussion we have today will likely mirror conversations that we've been having here in California for several decades, as California has grappled with continued changes to our ecosystems and how to keep pace with demands on our landscapes. The perspective I share today was shaped from my long experience managing resources here in California, but also through my leadership in the National Cattlemen's Beef Association where I served as Federal Lands Policy Committee Chairman, the national Public Lands Council where I serve as Ecosystem & Environment Committee Chairman, and immediate past Chair and current member of the Executive Committee for the California Cattle Council.

Professionally, I spent more than 30 years working with the next generation of farmers, ranchers, range scientists, lab technicians, and agriculture specialists in my role as professor and administrator in the College of Agriculture at California State University, Chico.

I appreciate the Committee's focus on conservation, rather than preservation, of Western ecosystems. Over the last several decades, quibbles over what counts as true "conservation" has become as divisive as any other issue in the public lands space. The word itself has become a litmus test for whether someone "cares enough" about the landscape, and the result is federal policy that has allowed groups to retreat into their own corners, each alleging that the other side doesn't care enough about the place in question. The real-world result is an unworkable structure that has prioritized planning over implementation, oversight over action, and has left millions of acres in jeopardy.

To me, conservation requires a holistic view of land management. This Committee must discuss conservation with an eye toward promoting landscape resiliency in the face of multifaceted threats. Conservation and resiliency don't mean that we protect the landscapes, only that we facilitate their ability to adapt, change, and continue to be productive as conditions on and around them change. These changes are innumerable: wildfire, flood, invasive species encroachment, and more can threaten landscape resiliency. In many places, including right here in Yosemite, perhaps the biggest threat to conservation outcomes is people themselves. Inherent to the concept of conservation is that we put the ecosystems in the best possible position to recover from significant events, or that we mitigate the severity of these events, not that we prevent these events outright.

While I'll spend a good portion of today talking about this holistic view, particularly mitigating the threat of catastrophic wildfire through tools like livestock grazing, there is a bit of irony that we're having this conversation in Yosemite National Park. Despite the objective of this park—to set aside this landscape and preserve it into the future—the Park and its resources continue to face threats like catastrophic wildfire and over-visitation. Often, when the federal government sets land aside through designations, management and conservation of these landscapes becomes much more difficult. The National Park System faces a deferred

maintenance backlog in excess of $22 billion, while Congress and the White House continue to add units to the system. While many of these landscapes or locations may warrant additional provisions under law, I urge the Committee to refrain from thinking this is the only model that ensures conservation outcomes. Even with the additional designation as a national park, Yosemite faces fire danger from inside the park and ecosystems around it as a result of poorly balanced management.

In April 2021, I testified before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands oversight hearing on "Wildfire in a Warming World: Opportunities to Improve Community Collaboration, Climate Resilience, and Workforce Capacity."[1] My testimony followed an incredibly difficultfor me, and for California, in 2020. The Bear Fire that became part of the North Complex Fire burned my grazing allotments and killed 80% of my cattle. My family and I, like so many others, spent weeks dealing with the aftermath of the fire. There were immediate concerns to address with livestock my family has raised and the lands we have managed for generations. Then there were the next set of challenges when we had a moment to stop, look around, and fully appreciate the profound damage on the landscape. Entire hillsides and valleys, charred black. Streambeds destroyed and washing out immediately after the fire. Generations of wildlife wiped out in an instant. This was not an isolated incident. The Camp Fire in 2018 killed nearly 100 people and destroyed the town of Paradise. It was the most destructive fire in California history, both in terms of human lives and numbers of structures lost. These fires continue to grow in size and intensity each year without action to mitigate danger.

Decades of mismanagement have brought us to this point. Largely, this mismanagement occurs on the millions of acres of federal or state land that comprise much of the West. Error, fear of poor outcomes, litigation, and poor policy development—both by federal agencies and Congress—have resulted in decreased timber harvest, reduced use of valuable tools like "good fire" and livestock grazing, and diminishing landscape health. Federal strategy now concentrates solely on suppression and post-fire restoration rather than mitigation before a catastrophic fire happens.

The stakes have never been higher: Over the last 5 years, more than 38 million acres have burned across the country. So far in 2023 (as of June 1), 18,300 wildfires have impacted more than 511,000 acres.[2] The last 5 wildfire seasons have been devastating for California. In addition to the 2018 fire that destroyed Paradise, hundreds of other fires from 2018 through 2022 caused billions of dollars in damage to homes, businesses, infrastructure, and ecosystem services. Costs, while hard to estimate, continue to mount. Estimates for damage wrought by the 2018 fire season range from $148.5 billion to $400 billion; the consequences of these fluctuations are felt by homeowners, business owners, and landowners who face service interruptions and are unable to insure their operations as a result of the mounting risk.

The human risk is real, too. Deadly wildfires have killed more than 150 in California alone over the last 5 years, while hundreds—or millions—of others have been negatively impacted. Earlier this year, Washington, D.C. saw firsthand how far wildfire smoke can travel when smoke and ash from fires in Canada darkened the skies for days. In 2020, the California Air Resources Board estimated that the state's fire season emitted approximately 112 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, roughly equivalent to more than 24 million cars.[3] A 2021 study from Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego concluded that particulate matter emitted as the result of catastrophic wildfire (through smoke) could be up to 10 times more harmful to human respiration than other kinds of particulate matter in air emissions, even from emitters like car traffic.[4] While Washington, D.C. residents dealt with these impacts for a week or two, repeated exposure for those of us in the West has become the norm. In 2022, the Air Quality Life Index reported that "California leads the nations [sic] as the most polluted state thanks mostly to catastrophic wildfires. . . The pollution levels, if sustained, are set to shave nearly a year off the life expectancy of residents on average in each of those counties. The

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[1] https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II10/20210429/112540/HHRG-117-II10-Wstate-DaleyD-20210429.pdf

[2] https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10244#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2068%2C988%20wildfires%20burned,over%20511%2C000%20acres%20this%20year

[3] https://aboutblaw.com/UU1

[4] https://scripps.ucsd.edu/news/fine-particulate-matter-wildfire-smoke-more-harmful-pollution-other-sources#:~:text=Researchers%20at%20Scripps%20Institution%20of,sources%20such%20as%20car%20exhaust

most polluted county was Mariposa, which experienced a particularly bad wildfire season in 2020."[5]

While 2023 is shaping up to put both California and the United States behind the average acres burned, wildfire season is far from over and we expect late season burns when precipitation ends. Increased precipitation across much of the western range has prompted a huge volume of forage accumulation that will serve as wildfire fuels for later this year and early next year if not grazed or otherwise mitigated.

It is clear that a suppression-only strategy is not working, and current federal strategies have done little to address the threat of ecosystem loss in a meaningful way. The U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) recently released updated 10-year wildfire strategy[6] is the latest iteration in a long line of planning efforts that effectively address only the wildland-urban interface (WUI), rather than the threat on a landscape level. While protecting communities and infrastructure is important, these risks to the immediate human environment will continue unless more work is done to address risks in the back country where fires gain speed and strength.

I offer a series of suggestions for the Committee's consideration:

Build on successful efforts and replicate these across the landscape. I appreciate Chairman Westerman and the Committees efforts to enact meaningful change through the Save Our Sequoias Act, which brings some much-needed simplicity to addressing wildfire risks to specific ecosystems. Expedited consideration and expanded use of all available tools should not be limited to these "exceptionally special" places, however. If these strategies are reasonable enough to protect areas with the most stringent federal designations, these or similar strategies should be freely applied across the landscape.

Direct agencies to utilize all available tools and integrate tools in a collective strategy. This Committee's leadership in developing the forestry title of the upcoming Farm Bill is crucial. Direction provided by this Committee in land management legislation, and separately by the Agriculture Committees through the Farm Bill, often exists in isolation. While the Farm Bill directs management of forests for commodity development, this Committee should seek to include language that would direct federal agencies to consider all effective tools when undertaking conservation activities. Tools like livestock grazing, prescribed fire, other "good fire" strategies, chaining, timber thinning, and even salvage logging should be able to be considered by the agencies at the same time to help build comprehensive strategies. Currently, agencies are limited in the scope of tools they can consider, and often the post-fire teams bear the burden of suggesting "creative" tools like livestock grazing for fuels reduction as pilot programs.

As part of this wider scope of tools, federal agencies should be able to rely on local and Indigenous knowledge for management of the landscape. Historically, Indigenous reliance on prescribed burns mitigated hazardous fuel conditions year-to-year. These cultural practices are now largely disallowed, allowing fuels to accumulate to dangerous levels. Failure to mitigate fine fuel buildups, either through fire or livestock grazing, increases the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Incorporating grazing in routine fire management strategies has been effectively employed across the West; cows can consume approximately 5 tons of forage per year, removing these fine fuels from becoming fodder for wildfire.[7] This reduction of fuel material results in slower, cooler fires that protects landscapes and makes conditions less dangerous for wildland firefighters in the event suppression tactics are needed.

Utilizing livestock for fire fuels management ought not be a divisive or polarizing prospect. I ask that policymakers in Washington look Sacramento's example on this front. In the wake of historic wildfire seasons in recent years, even this state has taken note of the value livestock bring to wildfire resilience (and, correspondingly, to helping avoid greenhouse gas emissions and hazardous particulate emissions from wildfire). California's Department of Fish and Wildlife issues grazing permits to manage excess fuels and provide wildlife habitat on lands managed by the agency. Our Air Resources Board recognizes that "grassland management strategies, like prescribed grazing . . . support soil carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and other ecological improvements." California's Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot recently remarked that "grazing is one of the . . . single best things we can do for wildfire resilience across the state" and spoke to the importance of an

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[5] https://epic.uchicago.edu/insights/wildfire-ravaged-california-is-home-to-29-of-the-top-30-most-polluted-counties/

[6] https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/Confronting-the-Wildfire-Crisis.pdf

[7] https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8517.pdf

"increasing amount of funding—wildfire resilience funding—getting into sustainable grazing to keep those grasses low." Wildfire resilience practices such as livestock grazing work, and confronted with the very real threat of worsening wildfire conditions, there ought to be bipartisan consensus endorsing these effective tools.

Address the complete failure to conduct post-fire operations. Too often, federal agency process hampers any kind of post-fire management. This Committee has heard repeatedly about the disparity in post-fire remediation when a fire occurs on state or private land and when it occurs on federal land. In the vast majority of cases, rehabilitation of burns scars should happen as soon as possible. Current federal process effectively prohibits immediate response, and often delays responses for years. In the case of the North Complex fire that burned my allotments in 2020, I saw this disparity firsthand. My grazing allotments are spread over USFS land and private land owned by Sierra Pacific Industries. In the last three years, Sierra Pacific has actively managed the burn scar by removing the charred timber to prevent future fire risk and replanting trees. Across the fenceline, USFS has taken no action. Brush, some of it invasive, is now growing up through the dead and charred timber. Without action, this brush will become fuel for another wildfire, compounding the impacts on the landscape.

Over the last decade, negotiations have repeatedly broken down when forestry legislation addresses the concept of salvage timber. This has been to the detriment of landscapes which face repeated and more severe burns because of the failure to remove lingering fuels. In many cases, salvage operations could easily be incorporated in post-fire remediation and replant scenarios, as has been the case here in California. The Committee should direct federal agencies to include salvage operations in a more fulsome way in landscape scale analyses so that the typical paralysis by analysis does not compound resource damage.

Expedited post-fire operations are not without precedent. As I testified in 2021, Governor Newsom has worked with the California Cattlemen's Association and with other land management groups to find an expedited path to reclaim burned lands and intervene in areas at critical risk of fire. If California can expedite environmental regulations or incorporate the expectation that post-fire remediation will be needed into advance environmental assessments, there is no reason this shouldn't be the norm at the federal level.

Improve federal use of fuel breaks and fuel breaks authorities. Both USFS and the Bureau of Land Management have authorities to create landscape-level fuel breaks to assist in the return to a more normal fire mosaic, yet both agencies either fail to use them or fail to defend them when the authorities are challenged. The Committee should provide oversight of the BLM's recent decision to withdraw certain Categorical Exclusions that would have facilitated the creation of fuel breaks and wildfire mitigation in key wildlife habitat.

Additionally, the Committee should direct the agencies to create durable fuel breaks as part of major infrastructure projects on federal land. One of the byproducts of a diminished timber harvest were fewer maintained roads and increasingly challenging road construction and maintenance packages associated with remaining timber sales. When a fire breaks out, fairly significant work is usually needed in order to make roads passable and safe for firefighters. This work could be done ahead of time through more thoughtful retention and maintenance of existing fuel breaks. For example, in a fire in Lassen County on USFS land, we watched USFS build a fire break along a road. Then, when the fire was out, they hired contractors to remove the break with boulders/barricades to disrupt the existing break. This fuel break would have served a purpose when the landscape inevitably burns again—hopefully next time with "good" fire rather than another emergency.

Conduct robust oversight of funding allocations that have been expended on planning, land acquisition, and other activities in the name of "conservation" without improving resiliency. Over the last several years, Congress has made repeated historic investments in natural resources programs, little of which has actually been directed at improving landscape resiliency. The Department of the Interior repeatedly touts conservation benefits that are limited to increasing public access and acquisition of additional parcels—both of which may have public value but do nothing to make landscapes less imperiled. Comparatively, few investments have been made in improving resiliency, particularly related to wildfire. The Committee should examine this funding and direct agencies to implement active management projects like prescribed fire, prescribed grazing, and other fuels management projects to prevent fire with immediate effect using existing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluations. Further direction should be provided to the agencies

to direct funding to the hundreds of thousands of acres in need of immediate post-fire remediation treatment that have not been prioritized through state or regional funding streams.

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list, the Committee has the opportunity to make meaningful legislative improvements to federal strategies for conservation. As we sit here today in Yosemite, surrounded by an area that many—including myself—believe is worth protecting, I urge the Committee to remember that there is nuance in protecting landscapes. Public lands, watersheds, rangelands, and federal forests; they're all worth protecting—but protection for productive landscapes means that we're protecting their productive value, conserving a resource to allow it to continue to produce, thrive, and change through time. This Committee, federal agencies, and land managers must avoid the allure of creating one catch-all, one-size-fits-all approach for these landscapes, otherwise we will be doomed to repeat the history that brought us the catastrophic fires of the last decade.

As an addendum to my written testimony you will see an account I wrote during the midst of the fire—*I cry for the mountains and the legacy lost: The Bear Fire*. In the midst of the Bear Fire, I kept the story as a way to cope with some of the most profound emotional challenges my neighbors and I had ever encountered. I also included the 2021 follow-up to my original accounting, both of which I hope inspire you to recognize the urgency of this conversation. For me, my neighbors, my family, and now for all of you, the threat of a failed conservation strategy looms large and burns hot.

I thank the Committee for the invitation to testify today and for the continued focus on these important issues.

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Appendix A

I cry for the mountains and the legacy lost: The Bear Fire
By Dave Daley, Butte County Rancher & CCA Immediate Past President

It is almost midnight. We have been pushing hard for 18–20 hours every day since the Bear Fire tore through our mountain cattle range on September 8th, and there is so much swirling in my head I can't sleep anyway. The fire destroyed our cattle range, our cattle, and even worse our family legacy. Someone asked my daughter if I had lost our family home. She told them "No, that would be replaceable. This is not!" I would gladly sleep in my truck for the rest of my life to have our mountains back.

I am enveloped by overwhelming sadness and grief, and then anger. I'm angry at everyone, and no one. Grieving for things lost that will never be the same. I wake myself weeping almost soundlessly. And, it is hard to stop.

I cry for the forest, the trees and streams, and the horrible deaths suffered by the wildlife and our cattle. The suffering was unimaginable.

When you find groups of cows and their baby calves tumbled in a ravine trying to escape, burned almost beyond recognition, you try not to wretch. You only pray death was swift. A fawn and small calf side by side as if hoping to protect one another. Worse, in searing memory, cows with their hooves, udder and even legs burned off who had to be euthanized. A doe laying in the ashes with three fawns, not all hers I bet. And you are glad they can stand and move, even with a limp, because you really cannot imagine any more death today. Euthanasia is not pleasant, but sometimes it's the only option. But you don't want more suffering. How many horrible choices have faced us in the past three days?

We have taken cattle to the Plumas National Forest since before it was designated such. It is a steep and vast land of predominantly mixed conifers and a few stringer meadows on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains straddling Butte and Plumas Counties. My Great, Great Grandfather started moving cattle to the high country sometime after he arrived in 1852 to the Oroville area looking for gold. The earliest family diary of driving cattle to our range in the mountains dates back to 1882. Poor Irish immigrants trying to scratch a living from the land.

The range is between the South Fork and Middle Fork of the Feather River, the drainage that fills Lake Oroville. It is 80-inch rainfall country from October to May with deep snow at the high end, and then it goes completely dry. Three major streams/rivers and hundreds of creeks and springs punctuate the land. My friends from the arid west can't understand why it is hard to gather—"don't you just go to the water?" Not that simple in this environment. It is difficult country, in some ways more suited to sheep because of the browse, but politics and predators killed the sheep industry in the country years ago. But the cows love the range and do well. Cool days and nights, no flies, higher elevations avoiding the hot summers in the valleys. A great place to summer cattle. They actually like to go as much as we do!

For those of you who have never seen this land, this isn't riding a horse into a meadow or open ridge where you can see cattle. This is literally "hunting" through a vast forest of deep canyons, rivers and creeks, and the high ridges in between. It is not an easy place to gather or even find cattle in the best conditions.

There are six generations who have loved that land, and my new granddaughter, Juni, is the seventh. And I find myself overcome with emotion as I think of the things she will never see, but only hear in stories told to her by Grandad. We all love the mountains. They are part of us and we are part of them. All destroyed in one day. I am angry.

As a child in the early 60s, days "going to the mountains" were the greatest ever for my family. It was our playground and our quiet spot. Sure, we worked, but we learned so much about the world, the trees, birds and flowers. And in my family sometimes that may have included learning the scientific name or at least the family of the plant. There were lessons on botany, forestry, geology, archaeology. We didn't even know we were learning but we imbibed it until it became a part of our souls.

And then my kids. For them, the mountains were the best! Rolling into a little seat behind Grandma and Grandpa to "go hunt for cows" as we gathered in the Fall. Hot chocolate from Grandma as soon as we got there. On cold, dusty or wet days, it was sometimes discouraging, but they loved it and still do. It was their sanctuary where "no matter what happens, this will always be here." And now it is gone. It is a death and we are still in shock and not sure how to move forward. What will

my granddaughter know of the truth and grounding that comes from nature? Will we gather cows in the mountains while I sing cowboy tunes off key and she sips hot chocolate? I am overcome.

When the news broke of the fire in our cattle range, my son Kyle, who ranches with me, and I were sure it could not be as bad as it sounded. We had close to 400 cows, most of them calving or close to calving in our mountain range, ready to gather and bring home in early October. They were the heart of the herd. Old cows, problems, bought cows and first calf heifers stayed in the valley. Only the good cows who knew the land were there. That first day, we had no access and were relying on spotty reporting posted to local news or social media. My daughter Kate, a veterinarian, who practices about four hours away, "I'm on the way." My youngest son, Rob (named for his Grandad) a soldier stationed in Louisiana, "I have a lot of leave and I'm on a plane tomorrow." All three have been unbelievable and we have all needed each other to navigate this heartbreak.

At first, we couldn't get into the range and were frantic as it was completely locked down because of safety. We knew cattle were dying as we waited. I received a call from a Pennsylvania number and answered before thinking. A wonderfully nice man from the Forest Service was calling to tell me about the fire since I had a cattle allotment in the Bear Fire area. I had to help him find it on the map! Frustrating. And he knew less than me. Later I got a call from San Bernardino (500 miles south), another fire resource officer from the Forest Service. I asked about access. "Well," he said, "maybe next week and only if we provide an escort. We have to make it safe first." He, too, had no idea where the allotment was or the challenge that I faced. All the cattle would be dead if I waited a week. I politely told him I would figure out an alternative—through private timber land and common sense!

I called our County Sheriff who has been a great friend of the cattle community. I had to wait one day, but he provided two sergeants to navigate the road-blocks until I was in the range. Was it dangerous? Yes. Were animals dying? Absolutely. Local solutions are always better. Thanks to Sheriff Honea, of Camp Fire and Lake Oroville Dam breech fame, and Sergeants Tavelli and Caulkins who got us access. All incredible people who get it. Local.

On our first day, Kyle and I make a fast trip up to reconnoiter. We are unprepared for the total destruction of everything we have always known. Nothing left and active flames on both sides burning trees and stumps. Shocking. Surreal. We make it to our Fall River corral somewhat hopeful that there would be green and water to mitigate the disaster. Everything is completely gone and we see dead cows as we start down the hill. Everywhere. This is our first step in what will be an impossible week. We go home hoping against hope that we have seen the worst. Little did we realize that it was just the beginning and it could get worse.

It is 3:30 in the morning now and time to start this nightmare again. To find the courage to throw some things in the truck, run with the kids to check and feed the survivors, and hit repeat. I dread it but know we must. And I work to be optimistic because that is who I am. Not easy.

As we make a plan and split up to run 4-wheelers up and down logging roads hunting life and death, I think how lucky I am. So many people have offered to help. I am grateful but it is difficult to explain how challenging it is to gather in almost 90,000 acres of incredibly difficult terrain (and that's on a flat map!). Each canyon and ridge is dotted with logging spur roads that could be choked with down and burning trees. Much of it is unrecognizable, even to me. Only those with deep, local knowledge of these mountains can help. Fortunately, my family, the Carter boys (Devin and Doyle), Brian Jones—all friends of my kids—and now friends of mine, plus my best friend Sean Earley all stepped up. They know the mountains well and have helped us for years. They just showed up and said, "We're here. We're going. What can we do?" So, we strap chainsaws and some alfalfa on 4-wheelers and set out hoping against hope to find something alive.

We split up and my crew takes the Lava Top and Ross Creek drainage, while the other half goes towards Twin Bridges and Fall River. It is eerie, and as Rob said, "There is no sound in the Forest, just death." We are learning. When we traditionally gathered cows, they were always towards the ridge top in the morning and down by water in the afternoon. Now, we find nothing high up, except the occasional dead cow that wasn't fast enough. We just hunt for the deep holes where there was a chance for water and life.

You learn as you ride through the apocalyptic murk. Rob's head goes up and I catch the scent at the same time. The scent of death and charred flesh mingled with the acrid smoke that burns your eyes. You begin looking in the draws hoping it is not cattle. It always is. Eight cows and three baby calves in a pile at the bottom of a ravine, rushing in terror to escape. A sight you won't soon forget.

But today, when we meet up, Kyle and Kate had great news. They found sixteen head at our Twin Bridges corral! The largest group to date. I had baited it with alfalfa last night and there were cattle standing in the little corral of temporary panels. Remarkable. Two of them are heifers that I gave Kyle and Jordan (my daughter in-law and Juni's mom) for their wedding. Kyle branded them with my Dad's original brand just to keep them straight. Someone in our crew said Dad gathered them for us so we wouldn't miss them. Maybe he did. My Dad was a cow whisperer who has been gone over four years after roaming the mountains for almost 90. Maybe he is still helping lead us and the cattle home. I turn away as I feel emotion begin to rise. Again. For some reason, I am more emotional when I find the live cattle than those that died. I don't know why? Maybe thinking what they went through and I wasn't there to help? And, more frightening, death has become more expected than life.

I completely dread taking my Mom to see this tragedy. She will be 90 in less than a month and still loves the mountains and gathering cows. She is tough but this could break anyone. She worked these mountains with my Dad from 1948 when she was 18, he was 21, and they had just married. She told me in later years that she had always loved the outdoors but really was "sort of afraid of cows" since she had not ever been around them. She never told Dad though and learned to be one of the best trackers and gatherers the mountains have ever seen, knowing every plant, tree and road.

You can learn more from old people. They may not use PowerPoint or Zoom. They may not be elegant in politics, but they have life experience. We are quickly losing that vital perspective from the land before we have allowed them to teach us. Far more valuable than a visiting scholar or great consultant. Local knowledge and observation. I wish we would listen.

I am again angry at everyone and no one. Why did this happen? I am absolutely tired of politicians and politics, from both the left and the right. Shut up. You use tragedies to fuel agendas and raise money to feed egos. I am sick of it. And it plays out on social media and cable news with distorted and half-truths. ON BOTH SIDES. Washington, DC is 3000 miles away and is filled with lobbyists, consultants and regulators who wouldn't know a sugar pine from a fir. Sacramento is 100 miles south and feels even more distant than DC. And to the regulators who write the Code of Federal Regulations, the policies and procedures and then debate the place-

ment of a comma, you mean well, I know. And I am sure you are good people. But you are useless when it comes to doing things to help the land. And the "non-profits" (yea, right), lawyers and academics, this is all too often a game for you to successfully navigate your own institution. "How do I get a grant to study something that if I looked closely, generations before already knew?" Nothing happens on the ground to make change. I do understand that most folks truly care and start with the best intentions.

For those of you on the right who want to blame the left and California, these are National Forest lands that are "managed" by the feds. They have failed miserably over the past 50 years. Smokey the Bear was the cruelest joke ever played on the western landscape, a decades long campaign to prevent forest fires has resulted in megafires of a scope we've never seen. Thanks, Smokey.

The US Forest Service is constantly threatened with litigation from extremists who don't want anyone to "use" the Forest. It is to be "preserved." Great job in helping to get us where we are. And I feel bad for Forest Service personnel. Most of them are great people who work there because they love the land like I do. But they are chained to desks to write reports and follow edicts handed down from those who don't know. One size fits all regulations are not a solution in diverse ecosystems. And, the Forest Service budget is consumed by fire suppression and litigation. What funds are left to actually work on the land?

And, for those of you on the left who want to blame it all on climate change, the regulations at the state and federal level have crippled—no, stopped—any progress towards changing the unmitigated disasters facing our landscapes. I wonder how many of you have walked the canyons or ridges or seen the wildlife and beauty at a secret stream?

Politicians stage drive by photo-ops to raise money at the fringe. None of us really like you. We just are forced to deal with you. Of course, there are many exceptions and you know who you are. I hate to visit an office to discuss issues when the legislator is far more interested in talking than listening. It seems that nobody can be a centrist and make sense and win. There is plenty of blame to go around on both sides of the aisle.

And just maybe it's both—horrible forest management and climate change. Don't you think months of massive smoke covering the West may impact the climate, especially added to our other pollutants? Does it matter which came first? Why not invest in solutions rather than using soundbites to gin up the base? And locally, we know the solutions. And those investments should be locally conceived and locally driven.

I grew up hearing the stories from my Dad and Grandad of the "last man out" lighting the forest floor to burn the low undergrowth. Their generations knew to reduce the ladder fuels that spread the fire to the canopy, to open it up for the wildlife. It was a pact between our friends the Native Americans who had managed it this way for 13,000 years, the loggers, miners and ranchers. They knew ecology and botany and wildlife. They worked together because they loved and knew the land.

It was the early 1960s and snow was already on the ground in December on our foothill ranch. I would have been about four and holding my Grandfather's hand as he lit some piles of brush on fire to open the landscape. It was the practice he had learned from generations before. And the CDF (now Cal Fire) crew showed up, put out the fire, and lectured him for burning. My Grandad was the kindest, gentlest and funniest man I have ever known. And he was mad. It was the beginning of the end for our forest home. And it has proceeded at an unprecedented rate.

I am angry. Try a control burn in the winter now and watch someone cite you because it is not an approved "burn day," you had the wrong permit and approval and you might impact air quality. It is beyond moronic. How is the choking air quality that has blanketed the west this past month, when people can't go outside without a mask, a better alternative? Are you kidding me? Bureaucrats and well-intentioned regulators who don't know they don't know have tied our hands, and the blame is shared at the both the state and federal levels.

Lest you think I am a complete rube, I earned my PhD in Animal Science 35 years ago at Colorado State. I loved teaching and ranching—so I did both. But I am a cattleman at heart. And, I have been involved in industry activities for many years, serving as Past President of the California Cattlemen's Association, current Chair of the California Cattle Council, Chair of the Forest Service committee for the Public Lands Council and Chair of Federal Lands for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. I have walked the halls of Congress, met with legislators in both Sacramento and DC and I am willing to advocate for the cattle community to anyone who will listen. I have dined with legislators in DC, Chicago and Sacramento at wonderful restaurants noted for fine dining. The company, food and conversation were enjoyable. And I have had bologna sandwiches and beer in the mountains with ranchers and loggers. Somehow, the air seemed cleaner and the food was better with the latter. Something about straight forward honesty and hard work is appealing.

I invite any legislator or regulator, state or federal, to come with me to this devastation. Leave your photographer behind, put on boots and let's go. I will buy the bologna. We have created tragedy after tragedy across the West, and we need solutions.

Look at the mega-fires California has experienced in recent years. If you study them closely, almost all of them start on State or Federally owned land. Fifty percent of California is owned by the feds or state, land that has unmanaged fuel loads because of the restrictions to do anything on the land. Right now, the only buffer to these disasters are private, well managed, grazed landscapes. They may still burn, but the fires are not as catastrophic and can be controlled. Butte County alone has recently had the Camp Fire which destroyed the town of Paradise, population of 20,000 where almost a hundred people died. And now the Bear Fire where Berry Creek, a small community of about 1000 residents had at least 14 deaths, an even higher percentage.

Our segmented view of the landscape has led us to tragedy after tragedy. As a rancher on the Forest, I am required, in the name of ecosystem health, to monitor meadow utilization, browse of willows and streambank alteration. Fine. I comply. If I hit 41% meadow utilization I can get a letter of non-compliance since 40% is considered the maximum. The Bear Fire did not leave 60% of the meadow! I wonder if I will get a letter of non-compliance? Again, the forest for the trees.

It is not the Forest Service range conservationist's fault that I have to monitor these three factors. It is the guidelines they were handed. But they are arbitrary and ineffective measures to "protect" the environment, and of no use against decades of unmitigated fuel growth. Can anybody look up and see the meadows and water disappearing? Is the health of the meadow crippled by unchecked understory growth that sucks the water out and allows invasion of conifers? It is easier to blame the cow. Look up. Watch nature. She will talk to you . . ..

I think it is as simple as not seeing the forest for the trees. And in my academic life, it was the norm. I worked with wonderful faculty, staff and students who were committed to research and teaching. However, we rarely looked at the big picture because we were encouraged to publish in our disciplines without seeking out how our work connected with others or how our small piece was part of a larger solution.

That "siloed" thinking plagues most bureaucracies and agencies. We only know what we know. And, in most disciplines in the academy, most faculty are now several generations removed from a direct connection with the land.

Listen to the generations before. Mega-fires are a recent product of lack of use of fire, less grazing and over-regulation. And if you look at recent history, almost every mega-fire that I can recall has started on state and federal lands. Mismanagement. And those catastrophic fires contribute to climate change. Yet the guidelines followed by the feds on National Forest and the State on State Parks lands are "one size fits all." It is beyond dumb. And no one's fault. And everyone's fault. Listen to the Forest. Listen to the locals.

The fire in Santa Rosa in 2018 was estimated to produce more CO2 and pollutants in one week than all of the cars in California in one year. We have already had six of the largest twenty fires in California history in 2020. The Bear Fire has eclipsed 250,000 acres and is still burning. To me this is very personal, but this is a much bigger problem than my family having our cattle killed.

I get frustrated with experts and consultants who drive by and "know just what to do." For 35 years I have attended conferences, given presentations and listened. What I have learned is solutions are local and specific. What happens in one watershed in Plumas or Butte County may be entirely different in the Lassen National Forest just next door. But experts of all kinds are glad to tell you how to do it. "Let's prescribe graze, use virtual fences, change your timing, change your genetics." Prescribe graze the forest and canyons? Yea. Right. They don't know what they don't know but they will take the honorarium anyway and have a great dinner on your dime. Another game where the people who live here and the land rarely benefit.

I have traveled and given presentations nationally and internationally for decades as the odd "academic cowman." I learned quickly that it is insulting to make suggestions if you don't know the land, the people and the culture. I love these canned "you should do this and this" PowerPoint talks. It is frustrating. My approach has always been "this is what I do and why—it may not fit here so don't force it." I loved those trips not because of what I taught but of what I learned from the locals.

Cattle, like the wildlife, follow the season in this wildland we love. They start at low elevation in June and work east and higher until early October. As leaves begin to change, they start west and down. How and why would you fence this land? Again, an expert from afar who wrote a text or did it in a different ecosystem thought it was a great idea. It is exhausting.

Yesterday was day four of the recovery effort. I now understand what first responders mean when they say, "rescue to recovery." I hold out little hope for live cattle. We have to get to Hartman Bar ridge between the middle fork and south branch of the Feather River. It is the furthest north, most breathtaking and the hardest to access. One road in and one road out, choked with downed and sometimes burning trees. We see a burnt bear cub trying to climb a tree, two miles further a mature bear, burnt but staying in the water trying to ease the pain. We give them both a chance because they made it this far.

We don't euthanize even though our brains say we should. Our hearts say let them try.

We have about six miles of road to make passable to get stock trailers through, but we make short work of it. Sometimes you can travel a quarter mile and sometimes a hundred feet. But chainsaws and strong hands get us there.

I have passed several streams today and tried to wade across one looking for cattle. It strikes me as strange. All the creeks have close to double the flow of last week. I see some springs running that haven't been active for years. And it hits me. We have released the water that the brush was sucking from the land. The Native Americans were right again. Observe. Let nature talk.

We pulled up the grade to Hartman and Whiskey Hill, and there were cattle tracks in the burn! Lots of them. I couldn't believe it. The fire roared up out of the middle fork so quickly I expected nothing to be alive. I had myself prepared. But we found cattle and some in pretty good shape. It was slow going. Incredibly steep and rugged with lost, hungry cattle. In one pocket we picked up 14 head with nary a scratch. Two old cows (12 plus years which is old for a cow) and a bunch of young stock. Those old ladies knew where to hide! Wisdom from days gone by.

After a long day, we had 32 alive and loaded. Some may not make it but we had to bring them home to give them a chance. They made it this far. More jarring, though, was to walk down the drainage by the old Mountain House Ridge corral and find 26 dead, spread from top to bottom. That fetid smell of death permeated the walk I used to love.

Even with the dead cattle on Hartman Ridge that we found, why did we find over half alive here and nowhere else? If anything, I assumed this steep ridge gave them no chance at all. And I realized that there had been a much smaller fire here about five years ago. The country was more open and the fire moved quickly. Less fuel and more things lived. Trees, wildlife, and cows.

I observed the same phenomenon in the remnants of the town of Feather Falls—where only a school and cemetery remain. The school had over 80 students less than 50 years ago, until the lumber mill closed and the village died. The school was destroyed by fire. The cemetery, however, still stands with green stately pines respecting the graves of mostly Native American veterans with flags at each grave. The cemetery was maintained free of deadfall and litter by family members. All the trees lived.

Day five begins.

We move as fast as we can, opening roads with saws and running 4-wheelers down every logging spur. We hope against hope for cow tracks but there are none. Hartman Ridge is about 10 miles long with the only narrow paved Forest Service road in the entire mountains. Nothing new but the cow tracks from those we found yesterday. Nothing at Socrates Spring, Harry Waite's, the Lower Reservoir, DeJonah, Sheep Tank Meadow, Stag Point, Steward Ravine—and a hundred more name places that are being lost. Nothing.

Up by Tamarack Flat, I run into five pick-ups belonging to timber reps from Sierra Pacific, the private land holder who we lease from and who has private property throughout our range. I am walking the logging road looking and listening, as I had run out of gas a mile or so ago. Too much country to cover! They were no doubt shocked to see me in that desolation striding down the road, covered in ash from head to foot. I know most of them. Foresters by trade who, like me, love the land. "It is all gone," they say. Almost. I told them I could show them a few pockets where trees survived. But very few. We are sad and angry together.

By the end of a grueling day, we have 7 head loaded. Five of them are cattle we had seen before and were just able to get portable panels to and load, 3 of which are badly burned and will get a chance for feed and water before they will most likely die or need to be euthanized. We know of three more live cattle that we have seen and not loaded. That may be it. Over one hundred brought home, so far, but I will be surprised if eighty live. Many of those who live will have lost their baby calves to fire. **There are no words. 20% of the herd we drove to the mountains on June 1. Maybe.**

Our crew will be smaller today. Rob flies back to his duty station in the army. Kate is back working as a veterinarian. They leave with overwhelming sadness and "we will help any way we can." Most of the rest of our crew have to get back to their jobs, but "are a phone call away with a stock trailer" if we find something to load beyond the two trailers we will haul ourselves. I doubt we will. Kyle and I will start the search, compulsively walking creeks and canyons that we have already searched, hoping something straggles in behind. You never know and you can't quit. That is not who we are.

And now we go on. What will happen? This is devastating emotionally and financially. And I am not sure of the next steps. I do know this: We must change our land management practices if we expect the West to survive. It is best done locally, not from DC or Sacramento, but I have tilted at windmills before.

We won't quit. We need to get tougher and stronger. We never have quit for 140 years and I won't be the first. Suffer the bureaucratic maze and try to make incremental change. And, as always, work with nature. I have to. Juni Daley, and the next generation, needs to see the mountains the same way we have seen them forever, to have hot chocolate on a cold fall morning and gather cows. It can't be just stories from her Grandad.

We found an orphan heifer calf today, about two weeks old. Her mother didn't make it. Kyle stumbled on her hiding in one of the few living willow patches along a stream. He followed her for over an hour straight up from the bottom of a canyon. We caught her and she is now on a bottle getting milk replacer. That rescue was good for my heart. My Granddaughter Juni's first heifer I decide! They can grow up together.

We saw life at Fall River today. Green grass trying to sprout at a spring. Life is resilient. So are we. Next year. And the next 100.

Dave Postscript

It is day 12 and we still are at the same pace because we have no choice. We are finding one or two per day that have lived so it is difficult to stop, but that is dwindling so we have to shift our focus to those that lived. It is hard to do. We have

put 1200 miles on the 4-wheelers on old logging roads and skid trails in the last few days. I quit counting the number of tires we have ruined and how much chainsaw work we are doing. Unfortunately, today we had to begin euthanizing some of the cattle that we brought home. But they were home, fed and watered.

The fire is still not contained and takes runs depending on the wind. I am not sure what next year will bring.

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Appendix B

Cattle grazing and prescribed burns can help California beat devastating wildfires

By Dave Daley

Special To The Sacramento Bee

April 24, 2021 06:00 AM

For all the misery that 2020 wrought in California, it also presented the state with a precious opportunity—a chance to seriously invest in wildfire prevention.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, in his January budget proposal, wisely laid out a framework for the California State Legislature to seize that opportunity. Because tax revenue, to the surprise of many, remained robust, Newsom has proposed an unprecedented, one-time expenditure of $1 billion in new wildfire-prevention investments. He is asking lawmakers to act quickly, so that about a third of that money can be used for early actions this spring.

State and federal officials have long talked of better preparing California landscapes to reduce the spread of wildfires but have often been overwhelmed by the costs of annually fighting relentless fires.

"This budget does represent somewhat of a paradigm shift," Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency, told the San Francisco Chronicle. "It's really a quantum increase in wildfire resilience investment."

Spent wisely, those funds could support infrastructure and programs to reduce and control the wildland fuels that enable fires to burn so broadly and rapidly.

The need for action has never been greater. Last year was by far the worst fire year in California history, as thousands of fires collectively consumed more than 4.2 million acres. Those wildfires included six of the 10 largest recorded in state history.

The economic cost to homeowners, businesses, ranchers and government agencies was in the tens of billions of dollars.

Policymakers now have both the motivation and resources to take urgent action. There are proven strategies to reduce the size, spread and severity of catastrophic wildfires.

Among them is one that is decidedly low-tech but unquestionably effective: Expand the use of grazing by cattle, sheep and goats to reduce wildfire fuel.

Research by UC Cooperative Extension experts has shown that targeted grazing is a cost-effective tool for managing vegetation, and one that can be employed in areas where other measures are not possible.

California's cattle ranchers, who own or manage much of the state's 38 million acres of rangeland, were hard hit by last year's unprecedented wildfires. Not only did they lose thousands of acres of pasture and hundreds of cattle, but ranchers also saw their rural communities decimated by fire.

They now need to be part of the solution by deploying livestock to reduce the accumulation of fine fuels on private rangeland and on public lands. The legislature can promote this proven landscape-management tool by appropriating funds for infrastructure such as fencing, and also authorizing long-term leases that would spur private investment for grazing on public lands.

Grazing is one of just two fuel-management methods that actually achieve the goal of removing fuel from our landscapes. The other is the use of prescribed burns—the practice of burning fuel under favorable weather conditions, rather than

allowing it to build up only to burst into flame during the hottest, driest, windiest days of the year.

Newsom's budget proposal seeks more than $500 million for large-scale vegetation projects including prescribed burning. The goal is to improve fire resiliency across 500,000 acres every year.

In addition to executing plans and conducting training, an effective prescribed burning program must also include policy changes such as reducing liability and reassessing air-quality considerations. These changes are vital to balance the effects of a limited amount of smoke from prescribed burns against the massive harm from the smoke and ash that blanketed much of California last year.

California has before it an opportunity to indeed change the wildfire paradigm from one of suppression to one of prevention. Lawmakers must seize the opportunity and act quickly so that work can begin this spring.

The reality of a changing climate is that California has seen a succession of monstrous fire seasons, capped by the worst ever in 2020. The possibility of what lies ahead is unsettling. The time to begin fighting the fires of 2021 is now, long before they start.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Daley.

Next, I would like to recognize Mr. Johnnie White, who is a sixth-generation farmer from Napa County, California, and a Board Member of the California Farm Bureau, for 5 minutes.

Mr. White, you are now recognized.

STATEMENT OF JOHNNIE WHITE, BOARD MEMBER, CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU, SEBASTOPOL, CALIFORNIA

Mr. WHITE. Thank you, Chairman Westerman and members of this Committee.

My name is Johnnie White, and I am a sixth-generation Napa County farmer residing in St. Helena, California, as well as a partner at Pina Vineyard Management, farming over 1,000 acres of premium Napa Valley vineyards. My wife and I own a cattle and forage operation, providing grazing for wildfire fuel reduction and direct-to-consumer beef sales.

I am a 20-year veteran of the St. Helena Fire Department, serving with the rank of captain. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the California Farm Bureau, where I currently serve as a Director.

Wildfires greatly impact California's $50 billion Ag industry. In addition to being a significant public safety threat, our industry continues to witness damage and destruction to our livestock, commodities, farms, ranches, wineries, farm homes, employee housing, and equipment.

Frequent wildfire has also created many residual impacts for California's farmers and ranchers. Many farm and ranch insurance policies have been terminated due to wildfire risk. While a few policies have been retained, they come with much higher premiums.

There have also been recent announcements by insurance companies halting coverage in California due to rapid growth of catastrophic exposure. While only a few companies have made public announcements, we are aware of 22 companies no longer writing in California.

Because farmers and ranchers need insurance options, the California Farm Bureau has assembled a committee comprised of

farmers and ranchers, insurance associations, insurance companies, and brokers. Working collaboratively with the California Department of Insurance, we intend to advocate and advance policies that bring critical insurance tools back to our state.

California producers also continue to face many challenges related to wildfire smoke and ash. Fires have covered California's premier wine-, fruit-, and vegetable-producing regions and extended blankets of smoke and ash, resulting in severe smoke taint to wine grapes and ash contamination to fruits and vegetables.

In 2020, following the Glass Fire and LNU Lightning Complex Fire, over 25 percent of my operation's wine grapes were rejected and left unharvested due to smoke taint.

Continuous access to energy is also a challenge for agriculture producers when fire risk conditions are higher. Due to utility infrastructure historically causing catastrophic wildfire damage, investor-owned utilities in California are required to safeguard their initial infrastructure to prevent fire.

One tool implemented is public safety power shutoffs, which simply de-energizes electrical grids when climatic risk, such as wind and low humidity, could potentially result in wildfire. While implementation of these shutoffs can serve as valuable public safety tools, farms, ranches, packing houses, and wineries are greatly impacted by the uncertainty de-energization brings.

Post-fire, California producers continue to struggle with sufficient access to risk management tools and timely access to disaster resources. While Congress has an established history of providing relief to farmers impacted by natural disasters, there is not a permanent, predictable program. This has resulted in continuous reauthorizations for emerging disasters occurring in calendar years not yet included in disaster programs, significant implementation delays, and confusion for farmers.

Because less than a quarter of California's 400 commodities are covered by a direct crop insurance program, the expansion of risk management tools in the 2023 Farm Bill remains a key priority for us.

We additionally support the continuance of disaster relief programs and have been working on initiatives that would improve the Emergency Relief Program, the Emergency Conservation Program, as well as adjusted gross income barriers routinely faced by producers trying to access disaster relief.

In addition to the numerous economic impacts wildfires produce, there are also significant impacts to our natural resources, including air quality, forested watersheds, and wildlife habitat. While air quality impacts are perhaps the most observable to the greatest number of people, forested watersheds that serve as headwaters for drinking water supplies are also greatly impacted.

Overstocked forests are resulting in greater competition for water and increased evapotranspiration, reducing snow pack and increasing strain on water supplies.

Species and species habitats are also being significantly impacted at times, contributing to new endangered species listings or the moving of species from threatened to endangered status.

Given the extensive number of wildfire-related impacts discussed today, farmers and ranchers have a vested interest in the quality and quantity of forest management activities. However, with nearly half of the hundred million acres in California managed by the Federal Government, private landowners are unable to solely increase the pace and scale of forest management.

We must remain committed to finding solutions to change the fire behavior and achieve fire-resilient landscapes for the sake of our natural resources and our rural economies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. White follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHNNIE WHITE, BOARD MEMBER, CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the Committee. My name is Johnnie White and I am a sixth generation Napa County farmer residing in St. Helena, California as well as a partner at Pina Vineyard Management, farming over one thousand acres of premium Napa Valley vineyards. My wife Kendall and I also own a small cattle and forage operation providing grazing for wildfire fuel reduction and direct to consumer beef sales. I am also a twenty-year veteran of the St. Helena Fire Department serving with the rank of captain. Additionally, I am also the past President of the Napa County Farm Bureau and currently serve on the Board of Directors for the California Farm Bureau, California's largest farm organization, comprised of 53 county Farm Bureaus currently representing nearly 30,000 members. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today before the Committee on behalf of the California Farm Bureau and our members across the state of California who unfortunately know the impacts of wildfire too well.

In recent years, with the St. Helena Fire Department, I have fought the 2017 Tubbs Fire and the 2020 Glass Fire and LNU Lightning Complex fires. Fighting the LNU Lightning Complex fires will always stand out to me as it was immediately clear there were not sufficient resources to adequately fight the fire given the quantity of fires simultaneously burning throughout the state. Because of this, the LNU Lightning Complex fire was fought for several days by farmers and ranchers using farming equipment with very little to no fire suppression resources. Our farming operation mobilized eight bulldozers and two water trucks to fight this fire. Because we were located on the most rural and least populated side of the fire, we spent three days fighting the fire on our own before CAL FIRE reached our side of the fire. CAL FIRE subsequently hired us, and our equipment, under an emergency contract and we spent the next week working for CAL FIRE ultimately constructing the fire break that stopped the forward progression of this fire. Unfortunately, the smoke from this fire caused 25% of our winegrapes to be rejected and left unharvested.

WILDFIRE IMPACTS ON CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

Wildfires have caused numerous direct and indirect impacts on California's $50 billion agriculture industry. In addition to being a significant public safety threat, many farms, ranches, wineries, employee housing, equipment, livestock, and commodities have been directly damaged or completely destroyed. For those only partially impacted, they are faced with the reality of rebuilding what remains of their operation. Because many farmers and ranchers live on their farming operation, some have also lost their home simultaneous to losing their farm and income.

Wildfire Smoke & Ash

California agriculture has faced many challenges related to wildfire smoke and ash. For example, the 2020 LNU Lightning Complex Fires that burned over 360,000 acres, covered much of Northern California's wine region in a weeks-long blanket of smoke and ash. The Glass Fire, which burned over 65,000 acres in Napa and Sonoma counties immediately following, resulted in such severe smoke taint that many wineries looking to produce a 2020 vintage were unable to harvest their crop. Monterey County, and many of California's central coast counties, as well as the

winegrape growing regions of the Central and Sacramento Valley, also experienced weeks of smoke and ash coverage.

Wildfire smoke and ash has also affected availability, and at times exacerbated shortage, of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed by farmers and agricultural employees. According to California Division of Occupational safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) workplace regulations, employers are required to protect outdoor workers with N95 masks or respirators when the Air Quality Index is 151 or greater. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, our producers were faced with significant challenges related to providing our employees with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Prior to the 2020 wildfires, California Farm Bureau and other groups worked with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to acquire about 1.5 million respirators that were released to county agricultural commissioners from state supplies. But, as the wildfires began, people who needed the respirators couldn't get them. This prevented even the most usual agricultural activities such as harvest, plantings, and cultivation from occurring at a time when domestic food production was exceedingly critical.

Insurance Availability and Affordability

Wildfire has also created many residual impacts for California farmers and ranchers in the areas of insurance, energy certainty, and livestock safety and evacuation. In addition to homeowners' inability to renew policies or affordably insure their homes due to wildfire risk, California farmers and ranchers have experienced the same challenges. In one instance, a member reported their premium had increased from $8000 to $36,000. Meanwhile, many southern California counties, as well as Napa, Sonoma, El Dorado, Calaveras, Placer, Nevada, Shasta, Trinity, Mendocino, San Benito, Santa Cruz, and San Luis Obispo counties, have seen policies terminated entirely due to wildfire risk.

Until California State Senate Bill 11 was signed into law in 2021, California farmers and ranchers did not have access to California's insurer of last resort, the California Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (FAIR) Plan, which provided basic property insurance only to homes and commercial properties at highest risk. This left commercial agricultural infrastructure, wineries, farm equipment, and other components uninsured. SB 11 authorized these operations to access the California FAIR Plan for basic property coverage and provided a necessary property insurance backstop for agricultural infrastructure. Currently, California Farm Bureau is sponsoring California State Senate Bill 505 that would allow for commercial insurance policies under the FAIR Plan to move back to the admitted commercial market, therefore providing opportunities for agricultural producers to move back to the competitive market with affordable commercial policies protecting farming and ranching operations.

In recent months, there have been announcements by individual insurance companies stating that they would stop selling insurance coverage in California due to the rapid growth of catastrophe exposure. While only a few individual companies have made public announcements, we are aware of 22 companies no longer writing in California. Because farmers and ranchers need insurance options to safeguard their ability to continue producing the food that America needs, California Farm Bureau has assembled a committee comprised of farmers and ranchers, insurance-oriented associations, and individual insurance companies and brokers to identify and advance policies that could bring insurers back into the marketplace. We are hopeful that this group, working collaboratively with the California Department of Insurance, will find ways to bring critical insurance tools back to our state.

Public Safety Power Shutoffs

With utility infrastructure in California found to have caused some of the most catastrophic damage in California history, the California Legislature and California Public Utilities Commission have required California's investor-owned utilities to better safeguard their infrastructure to prevent those catastrophes. One tool that has been implemented is the use of public safety power shutoffs (PSPS). These shutoffs simply de-energize electrical grids when certain climatic risks, such as wind and low humidity, could potentially result in a wildfire should the infrastructure fail or an object come into contact with the infrastructure sparking fire. While PSPS implementation can serve as a valuable public safety tool, farms and ranches can be greatly impacted by these wildfire mitigation efforts as lack of energy availability creates added uncertainties for agricultural operations.

Agricultural Protocols During Wildfire Incidents

Historically, hired vendors working with CALFIRE or the United States Forest Service on an active wildfire incident, including water tender operators, heavy equipment and dozer operators, crew bus drivers, vehicle drivers, mechanics, fallers,

swampers, and chain saw operators, have been required to complete the Fireline Safety Awareness course, a one-day, 8-hour course of instruction. Wanting the same opportunity as incident vendors, agriculture organizations supported state legislation, Assembly Bill 1103, which established a statewide framework for county "Livestock Pass" programs to safely provide livestock producers access to their ranches during wildfires and other emergencies. While prior to the legislation some counties had already developed emergency ranch access programs, other counties lacked the resources to develop and implement their own programs. AB 1103 required CAL FIRE to establish a statewide training program for Livestock Pass holders, codified a requirement that law enforcement and emergency responders grant ranch access to Livestock Pass holders, and established certain minimum standards for administration of the programs, facilitating and streamlining adoption of county Livestock Pass programs throughout the state.

While Farm Bureau strongly supports the Livestock Pass program, it is critical that crop producers also have the ability to safely and responsibly cross into evacuation zones to safeguard crops and farm infrastructure during a wildfire incident. While some counties are currently working with agricultural producers on "ag pass" initiatives, California Farm Bureau is supportive of making such programs accessible to producers of all commodities.

Ad Hoc Disaster Assistance

Recent wildfire and other emergency events have resulted in farmers and ranchers losing crops, livestock, farm infrastructure, and access to livestock feed. While Congress routinely provides relief for farmers impacted by natural disasters, there is not a permanent program. This has resulted in our organization continuously working on reauthorization of programs for disasters in new calendar years. Additionally, implementation of reauthorized disaster programs has resulted in delays and confusion for farmers. Because of this, a key priority for the California Farm Bureau within the 2023 Farm Bill is the expansion of risk management tools as currently less than a quarter of the 400 commodities produced in California are covered by a direct crop insurance program. Because any expansion of increased insurance tools will take time to implement, we also support the continued use of disaster relief programs and funding to assist producers and have been working on initiatives that would improve the Emergency Relief Program, the Emergency Conservation Program, as well as adjusted gross income barriers that our producers face in accessing agricultural disaster assistance.

WILDFIRE IMPACTS ON NATURAL RESOURCES

In addition to the numerous economic impacts wildfires produce, there is also significant impact on our natural resources including air quality, forested watersheds that serve as headwaters for critical water supplies, as well as wildlife habitat.

Air Quality

Wildfire impacts to air quality are perhaps the most observable environmental impact to the greatest number of people given the impact on personal well-being and the ability for wildfire smoke to travel great distances. Most recently, the eastern United States was blanketed by wildfire smoke that traveled all the way from Canada. In 2022, a UCLA-led study concluded that the 2020 California wildfires put twice as much greenhouse gas emissions into the Earth's atmosphere as the total reduction in such pollutants in California between 2003–2019.

To prevent severe impacts to air quality from wildfire, we must work to reduce hazardous fuels. One of the most vital components of reducing fuels in overgrown forest lands is prescribed fire, a tool that has been used for generations to promote culturally important vegetation and reduce forest density. Prescribed fire is a crucial component in forest resilience efforts, as properly managed burns can provide numerous ecosystem benefits including reducing excess brush, shrubs and small-diameter trees, encouraging new growth of native vegetation, and maintaining plant and animal species whose habitats depend on natural, episodic fire. Additionally, when used as part of a larger fuels reduction treatment plan, regular, planned use of prescribed fire has also been shown to prevent the kinds of catastrophic wildfires that can set back particulate matter (PM) emissions reductions goals. However, in the past century, due to altered fire suppression practices and a hesitance to mechanically thin forest stands, our forested landscapes are now subjects to excessive fuel accumulation.

Due to California's tremendous fuels treatment needs, California Farm Bureau previously expressed concern with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Reconsideration of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for

Particulate Matter as proposed. The proposal seeks to reduce the primary annual average PM2.5 NAAQS from 12 micrograms per cubic meter of air (ug/m3) to between 8–10 ug/m3. This proposed change would significantly limit the number of windows available in California for land managers to conduct essential prescribed burns to prevent future catastrophic wildfires at a time when state and federal land managers, including the Forest Service, are acknowledging the dire need to increase prescribed fire on the landscape.

While we understand that EPA considers prescribed burns covered under the Exceptional Events Rule, the 2016 regulatory process that codified the conditions under which prescribed fires could qualify as exceptional events is not sufficient enough to enable a robust prescribed fire program. Exceptional Events filings are also resource-intensive and often denied by local air boards. Without explicit regulatory allowances for prescribed fire to cause NAAQS exceedances, we fear that the proposal could reduce potential burn windows by as much as 80 percent. For this reason, we have written EPA urging them to develop regulations that enable greater use of prescribed fire in tandem with the NAAQS in order to prevent future emissions from high severity wildfires. Should EPA finalize the proposed rule as written, we urge Congress to consider legislation that creates an exception to EPA's requirements.

Forested Watersheds

Wildfires greatly impact forested watersheds that serve as headwaters to already constrained water resources in California. Headwaters, where rivers, streams, and lakes begin, provide flow to surface and groundwater supplies across the state. Like most western states, two-thirds of California's surface water supply originates in these mountainous and typically forested regions. The majority are located on public lands, including national forests, and span from the Cascade Range through the Sierra Nevada Range, down to the San Bernadino mountains and coastal ranges.

The challenges to restore and improve headwaters remain great as decades of fire suppression and lack of management coupled with drier, hotter conditions, have resulted in the recent tree mortality epidemic and has created unhealthy, highly flammable forests. Additionally, our currently overstocked forests are resulting in greater competition for water and increased evapotranspiration, reducing snowpack and water and increasing strain on water supplies during times of drought.

Because of the importance of these issues, California Farm Bureau was a founding partner of the California Forest Watershed Alliance (CAFWA), a nonpartisan, urban-rural coalition representing water interests, local governments, the conservation community, agriculture, and the forestry sector, created to promote the restoration and improvement of California's forested watersheds. CAFWA aims to promote healthier, more resilient forests, for the benefit of all Californians by working together to seek new ways to promote proactive, science-based, and ecologically sound forest management practices that will reduce the risk of destructive megafires. Our goal is to protect our forests, our natural resources, and our local economies by accelerating the pace and scale of forest restoration.

Wildlife Habitat

Catastrophic wildfire across the West is also negatively impacting a variety of species and their habitats. In California, we have unfortunately witnessed catastrophic fire not only kill species but also wipe out species' habitat range. Because fires are also impacting threatened or endangered species, wildlife agencies have also recommended the listing of species or the moving of species from threatened to endangered status as a result. Because of the strict nature of endangered species laws, this also impacts the industries and rural communities impacted by such listings and/or critical habitat designations.

INCREASING FOREST MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

With the presence of 18 National Forests in California, nearly half of the 100 million acres in our state are managed by the federal government. Given the extensive number of wildfire-related impacts California farmers and ranchers are facing, California Farm Bureau has a vested interest in the quality, and quantity, of forest management activities. Recognizing the need for robust financial resources, California Farm Bureau strongly supported the $1.4 billion included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), providing the Forest Service with implementation resources for the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, a 10-year strategy for confronting the western wildfire crisis. Two California landscapes, the North Yuba and the Stanislaus, were included within the ten initial landscapes. California Farm Bureau also supported the additional $1.8 billion in funding provided in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for hazardous fuels funding in the wildland-urban interface.

Within the additional eleven landscapes for treatment that were identified, three California landscapes were included in the second round of investments. These include the Southern California Fireshed Risk Reduction Strategy, the Trinity Forest Health and Fire-Resilient Rural Communities project, and the Plumas Community Protection project.

While recent funding provided by Congress in the IIJA and IRA to address fire risk should be celebrated, we remain concerned about the expediency, or pace and scale, in which treatments on federally owned lands are being performed given the quantity of treatment work that needs to be done and the fire threat our state is facing. We also remain concerned about whether the necessary financial resources will continue to be allocated so that current forest health investments are maintained in the longer-term.

To address management backlog and achieve landscape scale management, we must do more to enhance capacity and modernize technical expertise. To accomplish this, we must find a way to speed up the collaborative process and empower multiple jurisdictions and partners. Partnerships that assist the Forest Service with permitting and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes, as well as on-the-ground work, should be expanded. Private industry, including foresters and ranchers within our own membership, are highly skilled, trained, and operate equipment that can assist with vegetative removal as well as fire suppression activities. Livestock grazing is also an effective management tool for hazardous fuel reduction, improvement of range condition, and invasive species control. In many cases, these individuals are also personally knowledgeable about the local communities and landscapes, bringing additional contributions to a project. We strongly believe that by leveraging such partnerships, more treatments would be able to be performed on federal land, around rural communities, and along shared property lines resulting in a more wildfire resilient environment.

Additionally, both the federal government and the State of California have expressed interest in seeking ways to boost investment in new facilities where capital investments serve as a driver for forest treatments. However, given the significant presence of federally owned land, the challenge with this approach is that stewardship agreements do not include an obligation that guarantees forest material to private industry. Without some level of certainty surrounding supply agreements with the Forest Service, it will continue to be very difficult to spur new infrastructure investment because existing infrastructure is set up based on the landscapes in which they serve. In California, industry infrastructure and markets for low to no-value wood products is a significant challenge in need of solutions. We must work to collectively find ways to complete the NEPA processes for forest management and low to no-value wood products, affordably transport these materials out of the forest, and incentivize companies that can work on biomass or develop new, marketable products out of these forest materials.

2023 FARM BILL

California Farm Bureau strongly believes the 2023 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to build upon the successes of the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills in a way that better equips federal agencies to manage forests, incentivize more public-private partnerships, grow new markets for forest products, and support rural communities. The 2023 Farm Bill should also encourage the Forest Service to utilize all of its authorities, including new authorities provided in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). As work on the 2023 Farm Bill continues, we urge Congress to consider the following:

Good Neighbor Authority

Consider amendments to the Good Neighbor Authority that will leverage more partnerships that increase landscape-scale restoration projects.

- Allow States, Counties, and federally recognized Tribes to retain revenues generated through Good Neighbor projects for reinvestment in conservation and management activities.
- Allow for restoration activities to take place on non-Federal lands pursuant to conditions specified in Good Neighbor agreements. Direct the Forest Service to update existing Good Neighbor Master Agreements and Project Agreements to use revenue from existing projects for this work.
- Allow for both new road construction and reconstruction under Good Neighbor Authority contracts on a limited basis for the purposes of water quality, vegetation removal, and safe and efficient use.

Market Investments

The work being done on both federal and private lands to reduce catastrophic wildfire risk creates a large amount of low-value woody material. Unfortunately, there are not adequate markets and infrastructure currently available to remove this material from the forest and put into the marketplace. Depending on truck availability and infrastructure locations, transporting this material can also be very expensive.

- Expand current programs, such as the Wood Innovations Programs and Community Wood Grant Program, to encourage more market development for woody, low-value material.
- Consider cost share mechanisms to assist with transport of low-value woody materials to processing facilities.

Enhance Fuel Break Cross-Boundary Collaboration

Connected fuel breaks provide multiple benefits, including naturally reducing the wildland fire behavior, providing safer opportunities for firefighters, and providing tactical advantages for aerial deployment of fire retardant. Fuel breaks near roads can also improve egress for those evacuating from wildfire and ingress for first responders. Although there has been significant federal investment in such work, it is essential that similar work conducted on private lands is coordinated and connected so that the benefits of these actions is maximized for forest health and public safety.

- Authorize and fund wildfire reduction actions to assist private landowners in connecting, completing, and maintaining fuel breaks on their land with priority given to projects that link with fuel breaks on other lands in high-priority areas.
- Authorize and fund the Forest Service to enter into agreement with private sector entities to construct and maintain connected fuel breaks on federal lands in coordination with State and private landowners.
- Provide authorities, including cost share instruments, that enable USDA to partner with adjacent landowners to reduce wildfire risk.
- Seek ways to connect fuel breaks on federal lands with similar activities on state and private lands.

Remove Barriers to Increasing Pace and Scale of Forest Management

The 2018 Farm Bill added a new "rural" requirement to the Forest Service's Landscape Scale Restoration Program, greatly restricting the ability to conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects in areas with populations greater than 50,000, including areas within the Wildland Urban Interface.

- Amend the Landscape Scale Restoration Program to remove the rural requirement established in the 2018 Farm Bill.

The National Association of State Foresters reports that the USDA Forest Service has designated approximately 74 million acres nationwide as insect and disease treatment areas yet only a fraction of those acres has been treated.

- Amend the existing Forest Service Categorical Exclusion to increase the number of acres which can be treated for fuels reduction and pest treatment from 3,000 to 15,000+ acres or larger.

Each National Forest is governed and guided by a legally binding Forest Plan. Plans are developed through a collaborative process with many opportunities for public involvement and specifically designate which acres within a national forest are suitable for timber production. In addition, when a management action is proposed, the Forest Service must also initiate a separate National Environmental Policy Act process. Currently, there is lack of legal clarity about whether individual Forest Plans are an ongoing action under federal law.

- Clarify that Forest Plans are not ongoing actions under federal law and that consultation under Endangered Species Act Section 7 is not required at the forest plan level. Additionally, clarify that projects on acres deemed suitable for timber production in individual forest plans, be subjected to reduced analytical requirements.

Ranchers who graze livestock on federally managed lands serve as a primary caretaker of those lands in many ways. Grazing permittees should be empowered as partners in conservation and leveraged as a landscape management tool to help address buildup of wildfire fuels.

- Recognize grazing as a wildfire management tool in fuels management programs, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, and other collaborative stewardship programs.

Despite dozens of additional authorities intended to increase the pace and scale of restoration, there are still millions of NEPA-ready acres waiting for implementation. While significant increases in funding should increase implementation, challenges with the Forest Service utilizing existing authorities to their fullest extent still remain. There should be a path of recourse for stakeholders, or Congress, to compel options such as management, long-term stewardship contracts, Good Neighbor Authority, and others.

- Create an avenue where stakeholders and Congress can elevate and/or approve specific actions on NEPA-ready projects, especially on lands identified as priority watersheds, high risk firesheds, or identified in a wildfire crisis implementation plan.

Increase Flexibility And Efficiency Of Contracting And Procurement

Inflexibility in Forest Service contracting, procurement processes, and rules continue to be an impediment to forest restoration at the pace and scale needed to address the problem. Shorter-term contracts or longer contracts that are interruptible, request for proposals (RFPs) that have minimum bids, or other conditions that don't reflect current realities or the cost of doing business, issues with liability for participating agencies, and prohibitions on allowing knowledgeable stakeholders having interaction during RFP development are among the issues that are commonly slowing progress.

- Direct the Forest Service to revise contracting and procurement policy, guidance, and implementation of existing authorities.

Prioritize Reforestation And Post-Fire Rehabilitation Of Federal Lands

Millions of acres of forestland have been lost to wildfire. According to American Forests, a substantial portion of the over 4 million acres of potential reforestation needs on national forests stems from 2020–2021 wildfires when more than 2.5 million acres burned at high severity, adding to the 1.54 million acres of previously identified needs. While the recent passage of the REPLANT Act is expected to provide significant resources, more will need to be done. The current rate of loss is outpacing the nation's public and private nursery capacity and seedling supply.

- Prioritize reforestation of federal lands and increase investment for public and private nurseries for the purposes of reforestation.

In addition to investing in wildfire prevention, post-fire reforestation and recovery investments are also critically important for the health of our national forests and rural communities. While wildfire causes the majority of reforestation needs on national forest lands, extreme weather conditions including drought and insect and disease infestations also drive reforestation needs.

- Direct agencies to utilize all tools for post-fire rehabilitation, including livestock grazing, and provide funding for prompt post-disturbance forest recovery and restoration activities to prevent the spread of invasive species and protect water quality. Authorize agencies to utilize post-fire recovery funds for rebuilding of operational infrastructure, including federal and non-federal facilities, and direct agencies to allow streamlined access, approval, and clearing and removal of wildfire damaged trees impacting the recovery of infrastructure function.

CONCLUSION

With the presence of eighteen National Forests in California and significant landownership from other federal and state entities, California's private landowners are unable to solely increase the pace and scale of forest management. The reality is we are playing catch-up with a situation that has been worsening for decades exacerbated by drought, disease, and even climate change. Collectively and collaboratively, we must remain committed to finding solutions to change fire behavior and achieve fire resilient landscapes for the sake of our natural resources and rural economies. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these critical issues. I am pleased to respond to questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. White.

Next, I would like to recognize Mr. Matthew Bloom, the owner of Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station in Pinecrest, California.

Mr. Bloom, you have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW BLOOM, OWNER, KENNEDY MEADOWS RESORT AND PACK STATION, PINECREST, CALIFORNIA

Mr. BLOOM. Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Matt Bloom, and I, along with my family, have lived and worked on the Stanislaus National Forest for 49 years.

In 1974, my family moved to Tuolumne County, as my father started working for the U.S. Forest Service. He was a timber management officer. I was raised in a Forest Service family and have witnessed firsthand many of the changes within the Forest Service. Many of these changes have led us to where we are today.

I started working in the Sierras at the age of 15 at different pack stations, guiding horse trips in the various wilderness areas. In 1997, I bought Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station, which my family and I currently own and operate.

I have felt the huge economic and emotional impacts of multiple large fires. My experience comes from a lifetime of firsthand involvement in forest management. I have seen these changes, most of them relatively recent, to the U.S. Forest Service policies and forest management, both locally, regionally, and nationally, leading us to the poor position we are in today.

Severe cuts to logging and thinning projects, including grazing, have led to a widespread buildup of ground fuels, which have led to fires burning out of control. The ground fuels provide a ladder for fuels to climb into larger trees. As they reach up, the trees start to burn, the fire temperature increases, and the fire begins to crown.

When a fire crowns, it reaches the top of the forest canopy and extends from tree to tree. Any firefighter will tell you it is next to impossible to stop a crown fire, and they burn with such high intensity and are so hot that the soil becomes sterilized.

These changes in policy started when the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA, was used as a lobbying effort for various anti-logging and anti-grazing groups. These groups filed lawsuits against the U.S. Forest Service, halting many, if not all, timber sales—thus, for lack of a better term, weaponizing NEPA.

For example, the spotted owl guidelines levied on the Forest Service land managers crippled the timber industry and are largely at fault for the large fuel buildup on the forest. Rather than finding mitigation to stabilize the owl habitat, everything was stopped. These fuels are what led to the giant fires we have been experiencing.

The Forest Service changed the intent of their mission statement from multiple use to ecosystem management. This change in direction has allowed a one-sided mindset in land managers far different from the previous one of managing the forest for logging, grazing, recreation, and wilderness management.

The firefighting side of the Forest Service also changed its mission from fire suppression to fire management, thus creating a practically whole new management approach.

Natural fire and controlled burning are a vital part of a healthy forest and must be part of managing the forest. However, the Forest Service should maintain a focus on suppression and be mandated to stop uncontrolled fires as soon as they start.

Decisions to have controlled burns should be made by forestland managers and not by fire crews. Burning is a great management tool, but it should be done on the terms of those who know the forest and not left to random lightning strikes.

Another change I have seen in the Forest Service is the level of experience in higher management positions. Due to policies put forth through affirmative action, hiring practices on the U.S. Forest Service changed and positions haven't been filled based upon education, skill, or knowledge.

What has happened is an entire agency muddled by inexperienced land managers who lack knowledge about the actual land and forest system they are forced to steward. All of us know that managements and leadership make an unsurmountable difference in any industry.

Part of the reason I am here today is because I have felt firsthand the devastating consequences of mismanagement of the forest and fire suppression. The 2013 Rim Fire burnt 257,000 acres and destroyed over a hundred structures. Fighting the fire cost $127 million, not counting the long-term economic damage caused by closures and bad air quality.

The Rim Fire started from a campfire on the banks of the Tuolumne River. Initial suppression of the fire was curtailed because Forest Service leadership didn't want planes dropping retardant on the fire, fearing the effects it might have on the wild and scenic river area. This decision allowed for the fire to get out of control.

My resort is a seasonal business. In a good year, we have 150 days to make it, and we lost the busiest month and a half of our 5-month season because of that initial decision.

The Donnell Fire started August 1, 2018, burned 36,000 acres, destroyed 53 historic family cabins and a historic resort, Dardanelles. The fire started as an escaped campfire on the eastern shore of Donnell's reservoir, a remote location not easily accessible by vehicle.

The Brightman hand crew was sent into this remote fire. I personally spoke with the crew members that were present the

first couple of days. The Brightman crew told me they repeatedly asked for a helicopter to dip out of the adjacent reservoirs to aid in extinguishing the fire, but those requests were denied by the Forest Service. The Donnell Fire could have easily been stopped in a few hours with the aid they requested.

I and many others observed that air was clear for flying and could not understand why they would not use the available air support. After a couple days, the fire jumped the fire line and ran up the canyon toward Dardanelles.

Everyone was concerned and begged the Forest Service to do more, but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. They constructed an additional fire line, tried to burn it out at night, but it didn't work. We repeatedly asked the Forest Service to provide structure protection in the Dardanelles area and were yet again ignored.

The next day, the wind came up, pushed the fire over the line and toward Dardanelles. Standing at the road closure, I heard the radio call announcing that the fire was lost and would reach Dardanelles in 45 minutes. The Forest Service employee standing there turned to me and said: "What do we do now?"

It was too late. None of the structures had any protection, and the valley was destroyed within hours. Fifty-three cabins and a thriving historic resort were reduced to ashes. The highway was closed down, along with my resort and other recreation on the Highway 108 corridor for the entire month of August.

The fire running out of control can be totally attributed to wrong decisions made during the initial response to this fire. Witnessing this was sickening and heartbreaking. Not a single person was held responsible for the poor decisions that led to so much destruction and pain.

Change must occur and happen now. The Forest Service leadership needs to understand they are affecting massive forests, habitats, and history, and the lives of many people and families. Bad decisions cannot be allowed to continue. A national mandate for change is necessary.

We must take bold changes to policies if we wish to avoid these devastating fires. Change the Forest Service's fire division's mission statement from management to suppression. Amend NEPA to allow for more effective logging and thinning projects. Put agencies such as CAL FIRE in charge of structure protection. Streamline the private——

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Bloom, I am going to have to ask you to wrap up.

Mr. BLOOM. OK. To conclude, please understand there are plenty of hardworking, conscientious employees in the U.S. Forest Service that want to fix these issues. Changing these policies, holding line officers accountable, and providing the necessary resources for them to perform their duties must come from Congress and the Department of Agriculture.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bloom follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATT BLOOM, OWNER, KENNEDY MEADOWS RESORT AND PACK STATION

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to be here today, my name is Matt Bloom and I, along with my family have lived and worked on the Stanislaus National Forest for 49 years. In 1974, my family moved to Tuolumne County as my father started working for the US Forest Service, as a Timber Management Officer. During his career, my father was in charge of planning timber sales for the Summit Ranger District in Pinecrest, California. I was raised in a forest service family and have witnessed first hand many of the changes within the forest service. Many of these changes have led us to where we are today, facing a very high increase in devastating mega fires.

I started working in the Sierra Nevada mountains at the young age of 15 at different pack stations, guiding horseback trips into various wilderness areas. In 1997, I bought Kennedy Meadows Resort and Pack Station, which my family and I currently own and operate. I have felt the huge economic and emotional impacts of multiple large fires within the Stanislaus National on land managed by the US Forest Service. My experience comes from a lifetime of first-hand involvement in forest management.

I have seen many changes, most of them relatively recent to both US Forest Service Policies and Forest Management both locally, regionally and nationally; leading us to the poor position we are in today. I would like to overview the biggest changes and policies which should be immediately remedied.

Severe cuts to logging or thinning projects, including grazing, have led to a widespread buildup of ground fuels which have led to fires burning out of control. The ground fuels provide a ladder for fuels to climb into the large trees, as they reach up, the trees start to burn, the fire temperature increases and the fire begins to "crown". When a fire crowns it reaches the top of the forest canopy and extends from tree to tree, any fire fighter will tell you it's next to impossible to stop a crown fire, and they burn with such high intensity and are so hot the soil becomes sterilized, reducing the forest landscape to a pile of ash and making it difficult for even the smallest bush to return to the forest for years to come, thus also causing massive erosion. These changes in policy started when the National Environmental Policy Act (N.E.P.A.) was used as a lobbying effort by various anti-logging and anti-grazing groups. These groups filed lawsuits against the Forest Service, halting many if not most timber sales. Thus for lack of a better term, weaponizing NEPA, not for the good of all, not for the intent and safeguards of the policy, but to get their agendas pushed through. For example, the Spotted Owl Guidelines levied on the Forest Service land managers crippled the timber industry and are at largely fault for the fuel buildup in the forest. Rather than find a mitigation to stabilize the owl habitat, everything stopped. A massive build up of fuels occurred. These fuels are what lead to the giant fires we have been experiencing. The Forest Service changed the intent of their mission statement from "multiple use" to "ecosystem management". This change in direction has allowed a one-sided mindset in land managers far different from the previous one of "managing the forest for logging, grazing, recreation and wilderness management".

The fire-fighting side of the Forest Service also changed its mission from "fire suppression" to "fire management", thus creating a practically whole new management approach. Natural fire and control burning are a vital part of a healthy forest and must be part of managing the forest, however, the Forest Service should maintain a focus on suppression and be mandated to stop uncontrolled fires as soon as they start. Decisions to have control burns should be made by forest land managers and not by fire crews. Burning is a great management tool, but it should be done on the terms of those who know the forest, not left to random lightning strikes.

Another big change I have seen in the Forest Service is the level of experience in higher management positions. Due to policies put forth through affirmative action, hiring practices for the US Forest Service changed and positions haven't been filled based upon education, skill or knowledge. Positions were filled based upon mandated criteria, which is unfair, unjust and does not maintain the due diligence of the US Forest Service when it comes to care of the lands and the people. What has happened is an entire agency muddled by inexperienced land managers who lack knowledge about the actual land and forest system they are forced to steward. All of us know that managements and leadership make an insurmountable difference in any industry, for the US Forest Service this should be of particular note as it affects forest health, local economies, various watersheds, ecosystems and a multitude of user groups.

Part of the reason I am here today is because I have felt first-hand the devastating consequences of the mismanagement of the forest and fire suppression.

The 2013 Rim fire burnt 257,314 acres and destroyed over 100 structures. Fighting the fire cost 127 million dollars, not counting the long-term economic damage caused by closures and bad air quality from the smoke. The Rim fire started from a campfire on the banks of the Tuolumne River. Initial suppression of the fires was curtailed because forest leadership didn't want planes dropping retardant on the fire, fearing for the effects it might have on the wildlife and scenic river area. This decision allowed for the fire to get out of control and quickly. My resort is a seasonal business, in a good year we have 150 days to survive, and we lost the busiest month and half of our 5-month season because of that initial decision.

The Donnell fire started August 1st, 2018 and burned 36,000 acres, destroying 53 historic family cabins at various recreation tracts in Dardanelles and the historic Dardanelles Resort. The fire started as an escaped campfire on the eastern shore of Donnell's reservoir, a remote location not easily accessible by vehicle. The Brightman hand crew was sent to this remote fire from Brightman Station in the Stanislaus National forest. I personally spoke with the crew members that were present the first couple of days. The Brightman crew told me they had repeatedly made requests for a helicopter to dip out of the adjacent Donnells Reservoir to aid in extinguishing the fire, but those requests were denied by Forest Service management. The Donnell fire could have easily been stopped in a few hours with the aid requested. I and many others observed that the air was clear for flying and could not understand why they would not utilize available air support. After a couple days, the fire jumped the fireline and ran up the canyon towards the Dardanelle area. Everyone was concerned and begged the Forest Service to do more but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. They constructed additional fire lines and tried to burn it out all night but it did not work. We repeatedly asked the Forest Service to provide structure protection for the historic Dardanelles area, and were yet again ignored. The next day, the wind came up, pushing the fire over the line and towards Dardanelles. Standing at the road closure, I heard the radio call announcing that the fire was lost and would reach Dardanelles in 45 minutes. The Forest Service employee standing there turned to me and asked, "What do we do now?" It was too late, none of the structures had any protection, and the valley was destroyed within hours. 53 family cabins and a thriving, historic resort had been reduced to ashes. The highway was closed down, my resort along with other recreation on the highway 108 corridor was shut down entirely for August and we felt a heavy economic loss. This fire running out of control can be totally attributed to wrong decisions made during the initial response to this fire. Witnessing this was sickening and heartbreaking. Not a single person was held responsible for the poor decisions that led to so much destruction and pain. Change must occur and must happen now. Forest Service leadership needs to understand that they are affecting massive forests, habitats, history and the lives of many people and families. Bad decisions cannot be allowed to continue, a National mandate for change is necessary and with it needs to be accountability on the local, regional and national levels. If change is to occur, Forest Service management must be held accountable for the bad decisions made under their leadership.

We must make bold changes to policies if we wish to avoid these devastating fires. Most people that understand what has been happening, including myself, feel that changing the following policies can drastically reduce the effects of fire on our forests:

1. Change the Forest Service's fire division's mission statement from "management" to "suppression".
2. Amend N.E.P.A. to allow for more effective logging and thinning projects. The approach should be thin it, burn it and thin it again. This is an ongoing effort.
3. Put state agencies, such as CAL FIRE in charge of structure protection on all fires occurring on Forest Lands. They have the proper equipment and experience to handle it effectively.
4. Streamline the Private equipment hiring process to avoid delays in getting vital resources to fires.
5. Increase cattle grazing contracts in areas where it is suitable to reduce the brush and grass that fuel these fires.
6. Shorten the process to allow control burning to reduce fuel loads in the forest.
7. Hire more competent hands in charge of fighting fires and offer them the necessary resources to do so. Implied in this is the need to hold line officers accountable for their poor decisions.

To conclude, please understand that there are plenty of hard working, conscientious employees in the Forest Service that want to fix these issues. Changing policies like N.E.P.A. Affirmative Action and the mission of firefighters, holding line officers accountable and providing the necessary resources for them to perform their duties well must come down from Congress and the Department of Agriculture. It is unfair to simply blame the Forest Service without making the appropriate changes needed to better protect our forests and local communities. Thinning the forest through logging, grazing and control burns are vital to reducing the number of fires, but initial suppression of fires is paramount. The fires I discussed today could have been stopped before they devastated us, if a different management approach was applied. You must seek change for these policies or these fires will never end, will become stronger and hotter while our entire forest will be reduced to ashes. Businesses, jobs, families and local communities will be severely impacted. There are two options: make some bold changes or accept these consequences.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Bloom.

Finally, I would like to recognize Mr. Bill Tripp, Director of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy for the Karuk Tribe.

Mr. Tripp, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BILL TRIPP, DIRECTOR OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY, KARUK TRIBE, ORLEANS, CALIFORNIA

Mr. TRIPP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a great pleasure and honor to address this Committee. I am delivering testimony on behalf of the Intertribal Timber Council.

Today, I wish to convey some impacts of the Slater Fire that occurred in 2020 and begin to discuss long-term solutions for the wildfire crisis we now face.

Events like the Slater Fire tend to perpetuate fear-driven motives in how we approach fire management. We cannot perpetuate a fear-driven, negative relationship with fire.

In focusing on the beneficial aspects of fire, we can avert future disasters. We can increase community-based and collaborative fire use across large landscapes.

Efforts are already underway, such as the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network and Western Klamath Restoration Partnership, those programs led by tribes like the Karuk and San Carlos Apache, and those efforts being coordinated by nongovernmental organizations like the Nature Conservancy and the Forest Stewards Guild.

However, we also need the help of Congress if we are going to create the positive and lasting change we will need to maintain the resiliency we create together moving forward.

The Slater Fire happened above the community of Happy Camp, California. It burned over 100,000 acres in less than 12 hours. It started by electrical infrastructure. It reset the entire Indian Creek watershed to a landscape filled with snags and brush.

Two lives were lost, and half the homes in Happy Camp were burned down. Pets, livestock, and wildlife had little chance of survival, many of which died. A third person died in the post-fire recovery efforts.

It will take multiple generations of people to restore this watershed to any semblance of what it once was.

This year, many Eastern states experienced smoke impacts like those we face in the West nearly every year. The Slater Fire

produced readings on the Air Quality Index that exceeded 850 for long durations. This is more than double the threshold considered hazardous to human health.

On June 29, 2023, CBS News reported Washington, DC is having some of the worst air quality in the world. According to AirNow.gov, Washington, DC's Air Quality Index was at 163 as of 7 a.m., which is considered unhealthy. However, this is less than 20 percent of the impact we experienced in a given day of the Slater Fire.

The primary Karuk village in the Happy Camp area is called athivthuuvvuunupma, or place where Hazel Creek flows through. This Indigenous, traditional ecological knowledge indicates that there was once a lot of healthy hazel to make baskets out of and to provide nuts for food. The best hazel comes from black oak stands which grow in some of the driest, most fire-prone places. Excluding fire from this kind of environment sets the stage for disastrous consequences.

Through most of my career, I have watched the existing management paradigm put Native American cultural identity at risk. The occurrence of the Slater Fire had the worst consequence I have seen yet, but in the same vein signals a reminder that we must look to our past, be mindful of our future, resolve our differences, and rely on cultural foundations to lead us into a viable future.

It is currently against State and Federal law, regulation, and policy to burn in the time of year we are supposed to burn black oak woodlands according to our Indigenous laws of the land.

California has a 1-million-acre treatment goal with nearly half of the acres slated for beneficial fire use. A fraction of this is likely to get done, given the recent trajectory. However, burning 20 acres a day over a 14-day period, three times a year, in 120 different places would accomplish over 100,000 acres. Historically, burning 120 villages of Karuk territory would amount to 10 percent of the statewide goal and less than 1 percent of the target landscape.

We need to pool our resources to restore conditions conducive of carrying out these historic fire regimes, with peoples of place, while enabling a growing cultural fire practitioner base to help maintain the resiliency we all create together.

As Indigenous people, we did not ask for fire to be taken from us. It was taken without consent. It is our responsibility to give it back to the people or we will continue to have the negative consequences that come with fire events like Slater Fire.

None of us, not even the most advanced fire management systems in the world that currently exist here in the United States, can do it alone.

I would like to thank the esteemed Chair Westerman and the rest of the Committee for affording me the opportunity to speak, and I am happy to field any questions you may have during this session or in following up as requested.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tripp follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BILL TRIPP, INTERTRIBAL TIMBER COUNCIL

My name is Bill Tripp I am the Director of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy for the Karuk Tribe Department of Natural Resources. I am delivering testimony here today on behalf of the Intertribal Timber Council, which is a nonprofit nation-wide consortium of Tribes dedicated to improving the management of natural resources of importance to Native American communities.

It is a great pleasure to have the honor of addressing the House Natural Resources Committee on this important topic.

Today, I wish to convey some impacts of the Slater Fire that occurred in 2020, and begin to lead the conversation toward long term solutions for the wildfire crises we now face. Events like the Slater Fire tend to perpetuate fear-driven motives in how we approach fire management. We cannot allow this fear to perpetuate a negative relationship with fire.

Instead, in focusing on the beneficial aspects of fire, we can set the stage for averting future catastrophes. We can restore conditions conducive of increasing community-based and collaborative fire use across large landscapes. Such efforts are already underway, such as the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network and Western Klamath Restoration Partnership; those programs led by Tribes like the Karuk and San Carlos Apache; and those efforts being coordinated by non-governmental organizations like the Nature Conservancy's family of fire networks and the Forest Stewards Guild's all hands all lands burning program. These efforts are supported by a plethora of agency and institutional partners. However, we also need the help of Congress if we are going to create the positive and lasting change, we will need to maintain the resiliency we create together moving forward.

The Slater Fire happened above the community of Happy Camp, California. It burned over 100,000 acres in less than 12 hours. It started by electrical infrastructure. It reset the entire Indian Creek watershed to a landscape filled with snags and brush, with very few pockets of large live trees remaining. Two lives were lost, and half the homes in Happy Camp burned down, rendering many homeless. Pets, livestock and wildlife had little chance of survival, many of which died. A third person died during the post fire recovery efforts. It will take multiple generations of people to restore this watershed to any semblance of what it once was.

This year, many eastern states experienced smoke impacts like those we face in the west nearly every year. The Slater Fire produced readings on the Air Quality Index that exceed 850 for long durations. This is more than double the threshold considered Hazardous to human health.

On June 29, 2023, CBS News reported Washington DC as having some of the worst air quality of the world. According to AirNow.Gov, Washington DC's Air Quality Index (AQI) was at 163 as of 7 a.m., which is considered unhealthy. However, this was less than 20% of the impact we experienced in a given day of the Slater Fire.

The primary Karuk village in the Happy Camp area is called athivthuuvvuunupma, or place where hazel creek flows through. This Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge indicates that there was once a lot of healthy hazel to make baskets out of and to provide nuts for food. The best hazel comes from black oak stands, which grow on slopes where the sun shines most intensely, some of the driest, most fire prone places. Excluding fire from this kind of environment sets the stage for disastrous consequences. Every year, I witness fire being excluded from areas that need to burn for our homelands to remain survivable. Through most of my career I have watched the existing management paradigm put Native American Cultural Identity at risk. The occurrence of the Slater Fire had the worst consequence I have seen yet, but in the same vein signals an inflection point that serves to remind us that we must look to our past, be mindful of the changes coming in our future, resolve our differences, and rely on cultural foundations to lead us into a viable future. It is currently against state and federal law, regulation and policy to burn in the time of year we are supposed to burn black oak woodlands according to our Indigenous laws of the land; we need to bring alignment between these systems.

California has a 1 Million acre treatment goal, with nearly half of the acres slated for beneficial fire use. A fraction of this is likely to get done given the recent trajectory. However, most people don't realize that burning 20 acres a day over a 14-day period 3 times a year in 120 different places would accomplish over 100,000 acres. This would amount to about 10% of the statewide goal on less than 1% of the target landscape. We need to pool our resources to restore conditions conducive of carrying out these historic fire regimes, with peoples of place, while enabling a growing cultural fire practitioner base to lead the charge in maintaining the resiliency we all create together. As Indigenous peoples, we did not ask for fire to be taken from

us, it was taken without consent. It is our responsibility in the modern era to give it back to the people, or we will continue to have the negative consequences that come with fire events like the Slater Fire. None of us, not even with the most advanced fire management systems in the world that currently exist here in the United States, can do it alone.

Congress has an important role in this effort, both by providing equitable funding to Tribes and by creating a legal framework that enables Tribal stewardship not just on Tribal lands, but across the landscape. Some specific recommendations can be found in the attached letter, from the Karuk Tribe to the U.S. Forest Service.

I would like to thank the esteemed chair Bruce Westerman and rest of this committee for affording me this opportunity to speak. I am happy to field any questions you may have during this session or in following up as requested.

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ATTACHMENT

Karuk Tribe
Happy Camp, CA

June 20, 2023

Christopher Swanston
Director, Office of Sustainability and Climate
201 14th Street SW, Mailstop 1108
Washington, DC 20250-1124
Submitted via: www.regulations.gov

Re: Comments of the Karuk Tribe on Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking re Forest Service Organization, Functions, and Procedures (Docket ID FS-2023-0006)

Ayukîi (Greetings) Mr. Swanston,

Since time immemorial, the Karuk People have lived in the Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains in the mid-Klamath River region of northern California. With an Aboriginal Territory that includes an estimated 1.38 million acres, Karuk people historically resided in more than one hundred villages along the Klamath and Salmon Rivers and tributaries, and we continue to live here and practice our culture today. Thriving with an economy supported by rich natural endowments and a strong culture-based commitment to land stewardship, Karuk eco-cultural management has shaped the region's ecological conditions for millennia and continues to do so.

The Klamath River and its tributaries, forests, grasslands, and high country are essential for the cultural, spiritual, economic, and physical health of Karuk people. Because the changing climate poses serious threats for Karuk culture, sovereignty, and all life on earth, it is essential that Karuk people be involved in management and co-management of our lands of territorial affiliation. While a serious threat, the needs to address climate change is perhaps most productively viewed as an opportunity to assert and expand Karuk traditional practices, tribal management authority, and culture in recognition of Karuk tribal sovereignty.

Karuk tribal knowledge and management principles can be used to mitigate, prepare for, and adapt to the growing impacts of climate change. However, we need our Forest Service partners to create the enabling conditions that support the Tribe to effectively engage on federally administered lands. Thus, the Karuk Tribe recommends the following reforms to the USDA Forest Service's policies and practices in order to promote climate resilience:

1. Cultural Burning: Separate and Distinct from Prescribed Fire

The fire suppression and exclusion paradigm has adversely affected ecosystems and the human communities that depend on them, including the Karuk. This has contributed to the increasing scale and severity of wildfire and has made our landscapes and communities more vulnerable to the many effects of climate change (see more within the Karuk Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Karuk Climate Adaptation Plan—available here: https://karuktribeclimatechangeprojects.com/).

One important step in the right direction would be for the US Forest Service to recognize cultural burning as separate and distinct from prescribed fire. Cultural burning is governed under the sovereign authority of tribes, and Indigenous cultural burning practices are distinguished from other types of fire management (e.g., local, state and federal agency) as they are applied within the context of traditional law, rights, objectives, and outcomes. The Karuk Tribe seeks to retain this practice and have our federal partners recognize our traditional forest management practice.

Enabling and supporting Indigenous cultural fire practitioners to reinstate cultural fire regimes is critical to restore and maintain balanced ecosystem processes and functions and make them more resilient to climate change. It is also one step towards accounting for past social and ecological injustices. **In addition to recognizing cultural burning as separate and distinct from prescribed fire, the USFS should enable and accommodate cultural burning by Tribes on all lands administered by the Forest Service that fall within the each Tribe's lands of territorial affiliation.** Coordination and communication between the USFS and the interested Tribe(s) should be encouraged, but federal agency approval should not be required. This will be an important way to demonstrate co-management between the USFS and Tribes by creating spaces and structures for mutually-beneficial coordinated decision-making.

2. Agency-specific NEPA Regulatory Changes

For millennia, Indigenous people have applied fire to landscapes across the United States in deliberate, frequent, and highly knowledgeable ways. As such, **the intentional use of fire by Tribes should be considered a component of baseline environmental conditions, and not as a major federal action requiring National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and assessment.**

Moreover, **the Forest Service should consider how to partner with and enable Tribes to effectively prepare NEPA and other environmental documents when required for land management activities that can help us both adapt to and mitigate the climate crisis.** Often the environmental compliance portion of a project can take years, and we are watching our landscapes (and communities like Happy Camp, CA) both accumulate fuels and then burn in high severity wildfire while we wait. Empowering Tribes to prepare cultural resource sections as well as entire NEPA documents, and to engage in planning activities in ancestral territories and across jurisdictions using tools such as Integrated Resource Management Plans, will help the Forest Service and other federal agencies better address the climate crisis.

In order to do so, **it will be critical that the USFS actively fill leadership positions with people willing to engage with Tribes and willing to lead the agency into a new era of co-management, co-stewardship, and coordinated decision-making.** Criteria for hiring and promoting Forest Supervisors, District Rangers, Regional leads, and other key leadership positions should reflect this as a priority.

3. Co-Management Agreement Templates

The Administration has repeatedly highlighted the importance of Tribal co-stewardship and co-management, and has directed the Secretary of Agriculture to strengthen partnerships between Tribes and federal agencies. However, meaningful co-management has been hindered by federal law and unclear guidance. Agreements outside of the TFPA context have not been designed for work with Tribes. Thus, **the Forest Service should examine the agreement structures they are currently using to work with tribes, and should then collaborate with tribes to develop co-management agreement templates that recognize tribal decision-making authority, tribal sovereignty, self governance, and self determination.**

Additionally, the USFS should assess hiring and promotions criteria and invest in the training and resources required to develop a workforce that is sufficiently knowledgeable, cooperative, and creative in order to meaningfully partner with Tribes on co-management agreements. The USFS should provide funding to tribal programs included in co-management agreements to allow tribes to carry out activities of mutual benefit to Tribes, the federal government, and the public. In short, it is essential for USFS to invest in the future of the Tribes and their workforces, while promoting co-management.

4. Planning Authority (IRMP)

Effective collaboration and integration of Indigenous Knowledge into management practices on USFS lands depends not only on landscape-scale project implementation but landscape-scale planning efforts and engagement with Tribes. This requires cross-boundary planning, burning, and land management. Currently, Integrated Resource Management Plans (IRMP) are a tool that allow for comprehensive management of natural resources on Tribal lands, and, in limited circumstances, federal lands adjacent to Tribal lands.

Expansion of the use of IRMPs across boundaries and jurisdictions, including on USFS lands throughout Tribes' ancestral territories could promote cohesive, sustainable ecological restoration and climate resilience through effective planning and coordination across jurisdictions and in ways that honor and respect tribal sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge, practice, and belief systems. **The Forest Service should explore how to better engage with this tool within its existing authority, and we would be happy to collaborate as a pilot example.**

5. Reserved and Retained Treaty Rights

Reserved, retained, and other tribal rights are often misunderstood and ignored in the context of Tribal sovereignty and land stewardship. Treaties generally outline the rights that Tribes give up in exchange for other benefits, actions, or commitments from the United States. Any rights not explicitly described in treaties are therefore retained, and must be respected by the U.S. Government. These rights may be applied both on land retained and land ceded throughout Tribes' lands of territorial affiliation, including land administered by the USFS.

While some rights have been recognized and respected as retained by the USFS, there are a number of other rights that are also retained by Tribes, but not always recognized by the Forest Service. These include rights such as cultural burning, as well as the right to access and utilize traditional foods, fibers, and medicines.

The USFS should, whenever appropriate, proactively seek out Tribal consultation to ensure that retained rights are upheld on land administered by the USFS that falls within Tribal lands of territorial affiliation, including those of cultural and customary use. The USFS should also identify potential barriers to the exercise of reserved, retained and other rights by Tribal members, including the right to cultural burning and access and resource utilization, and make clear to employees and representatives of the USFS that the exercising of these rights is welcome and encouraged.

6. Regenerative Economic Systems

Current funding mechanisms for collaboration between Tribes and the USFS are incompatible with the concept of Tribal sovereignty, as implementation of tribal policies and priorities is heavily dependent on funder priorities, review, and approval. As the USFS seeks to integrate Indigenous Knowledge into its management practices, fiscal limitations on these activities and on Tribal authority to manage funds impacts the potential for sustainable co-management between Tribes and the USFS. Reliance on project-based grant funding, in particular, makes it difficult for Tribes to build stability and reclaim self-sufficiency.

Developing a stable, skilled land management workforce, for example, is challenging based on a system of project-based funding, given that positions cannot be guaranteed beyond the timeline of a given project. Members of the local Tribal community may be unable to accept the instability of project-based grant-funded positions as a way to build their careers, making it difficult to attract and retain a skilled Tribal workforce, while also creating challenges for Tribes seeking to build institutional knowledge. The accumulation of institutional knowledge, local workforce capacity, and financial resources over time is difficult to impossible within this funding paradigm.

This is happening at a time when there is immense need for tribal leadership and tribal workforce to implement landscape-scale restoration of the ecological systems and fire regimes needed to ensure greater resilience in the face of climate change.

In contrast, ***regenerative economic systems*** are built on the concept that tribal programs can and should eventually become self-sustaining or otherwise perpetuated. Instead of a linear system in which Tribes must receive and exhaust funding repeatedly, a regenerative system could follow various models, such as an endowment model, where income under Tribal management could be invested in order to provide cash-flow over time. Transitioning to regenerative economic systems will require transformative change. However, specific policy changes can promote Tribal

sovereignty as well as collaboration for the purpose of landscape-scale stewardship. **When creating or implementing funding programs and agreements, the Forest Service should keep these principles in mind, and consider innovative ways that tribes can be supported to re-invest in themselves and in tribal programs to create long-term sustainability, resilient tribal programs, and a stable tribal workforce.**

7. Consultation Funding

To effectively and meaningfully engage in Tribal consultation requests put forth by the Forest Service, Tribes must often dedicate significant time and resource capacity, which they often do not have to give. If the Forest Service wishes to equitably seek and integrate tribal consultation into agency functions, policies, and procedures moving forward, **the USFS should consider providing funding to Tribes to enable meaningful participation.**

Tribal knowledge and management principles mitigate climate impacts for the benefit of Native and non-Native communities alike—so increased investment to develop reciprocal relationships between governments is critical to preserving social, economic, cultural, and ecological resilience to climate change.

Yôotva (thank you) for taking these recommendations into consideration. The Karuk people are a "fix the world" people, and we look forward to meaningful engagement with you all on these recommendations as the climate and wildfire realities we are facing require coordinated and effective action.

Yôotva (Thank you),

RUSSELL ATTEBERY,
Karuk Tribal Chairman

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Tripp.

And that concludes our witness testimony.

I would again like to thank all of our witnesses for your fine testimony today and for the efforts you have put in to be here and to provide insight.

We are now going to move to Member questions. I will recognize each Member for 5 minutes of questions. We will start with Mr. McClintock.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you very much.

Supervisor Turnboo, you described the tragedy of the utter destruction of the county of Grizzly Flats. I described a categorical exclusion from NEPA that expedited forest thinning in Tahoe that was responsible for stopping the Caldor Fire short of South Lake Tahoe. You described the Trestle Project and the fact that it has been held up by 10 years.

If that categorical exclusion authority had been available to the El Dorado National Forest as it has been for 7 years to the Tahoe Basin, would the town of Grizzly Flats have survived?

Mr. TURNBOO. Yes. The thing is, if you click on the link that I have on that presentation that I gave all of you, it talks about the Trestle Project.

And the Forest Service even admitted that if they didn't do this project they would lose Grizzly Flats. Well, that is what happened, because they took too long and drug their feet. And they only did 14 percent of that over 20,000 acres. And if they would have had that project complete, it would have saved Grizzly Flats. The town would have not gone through that.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. These restrictive laws and the endless litigation that they spawn could been put aside in favor of doing the

forest management that would have saved the town of Grizzly Flats.

Is this a question of placing green left ideology ahead of common sense?

Mr. TURNBOO. Exactly. And let me get back to it a little bit on a lot of this, like the Sierra Club, where these projects are put in place and then they stop it with lawsuits. And then it goes on and on and on, and then it brings it back again.

If that stuff could stop, we wouldn't have the problems we have today.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. I have to cut you off because my time is limited. I apologize for that.

Dr. Daley, the private forestlands are not subject to the restrictive laws like NEPA that we have been discussing. By all accounts, they maintain their forestland in excellent condition. It is resilient. It is fire resistant. It is healthy. You could often tell the boundary line between the private and public lands by the condition of the forest on each side of the boundary lines.

So, for those who say, well, that is climate change, how clever the climate to know exactly where the boundary lines are.

Our private foresters maintain healthy and resilient forests and they make an awful lot of money doing that. Yet, by all accounts, the Federal lands are maintained in decrepit conditions and it costs us millions of dollars every year.

How do you explain that mystery?

Dr. DALEY. I am not sure it is a mystery.

And my example is, my Federal permit is checkerboarded with Sierra Pacific International. So, I have two landlords. One is the Federal Government. One is Mr. Emmerson with Sierra Pacific in checkerboard with no fences.

In that fire scar where we take our cattle in December, Sierra Pacific has made a commitment to plant 3 million trees a year for 3 years—they have exceeded that goal, after removing the timber and being able to harvest it. It is not a pretty sight, I will be honest, to have all that timber gone, but there are now 9 million new trees and more coming because private lands could——

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. I observed the same thing when I toured the footprint of the King Fire 5 years after that fire had decimated the forest. The SPI lands were newly planted. They were green and growing. The Federal lands had been abandoned. There was brush buildup and dead trees now falling on top of that brush for a perfect fire stack for a second-generation fire.

Mr. Bloom, we are told that our situation is due to a century of fire suppression, but fire suppression was only half of that equation. The other and more important half was you remove that excess timber so that it doesn't catch fire, so that you don't have to put out those fires. That was an equation that worked.

Without removing the excess timber, it is going to burn. There is no doubt about that. That is the only other way it can come out of the forest.

This "fire is our friend" ideology produced the Tamarack Fire. That is the one that smoldered for 10 days while the Forest Service took pictures of it for Facebook. Never bothered to drop a bucket of water on it. It exploded out of control on the 10th day and took

out 70,000 acres of forestland. You just described that same ideology and the effect that that had on the Donnell Fire.

Are we being too cavalier and careless using fire for forest management these days?

Mr. BLOOM. I think that fire has a big role to play in management of fuels, but I think it needs to be on our terms. I think land managers need to decide when to do controlled burns and when it is appropriate in a controlled fashion and not leave it up to fire crews to decide or a lightning strike or some random thing. I think it is a great thing and needs to be done but it has to be done on our terms, not at the whim of a fire crew.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

I will now turn to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Federal Lands from Wisconsin.

Mr. Tiffany, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Daley, how many people were killed in the fires that you alluded to in your testimony?

Dr. DALEY. About 110 between the Camp Fire and the North Complex Fire.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, in other words, 110 Americans were killed as a result of improper forest management here in the United States of America.

Dr. DALEY. Communities destroyed, livelihoods destroyed, people lost, never to recover.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Turnboo, what does Grizzly Flats look like today?

Mr. TURNBOO. Grizzly Flats is devastated, is what it is. There are a lot of RVs, small trailers that are people living on their property. We are starting to rebuild a little bit. A few of the houses and stuff are coming back. But a lot of those people were underinsured.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is it safe to say that it has affected tourism and recreation in your area?

Mr. TURNBOO. Oh, definitely. It really has. We lost the only school we had out there. We had the only church that was out in Grizzly Flats. Also, it impacted the water agency.

But not only that, right now I work with the Secretary of Ag and right now we are working with the Forest Service to build a community center so they have a sense of community and bring that community back together in Grizzly Flats.

I spoke to the Secretary of Agriculture. We made this happen. And the Forest Service was very generous, giving the Grizzly Flats 5 acres so we can build that new community center.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Menetrey, why not move employees? You said in your testimony. Why not move employees within the Park Service?

Mr. MENETREY. I believe I was talking about Forest Service.

Mr. TIFFANY. Forest Service.

Mr. MENETREY. Well, because if you keep them until they finish the project that they were sent there to do and they get shuffled off to another situation instead of maybe providing some more employees for the other projects.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, are you saying, in instances churning employees by the Federal Government is actually not more efficient?

Mr. MENETREY. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. And, in fact, is it inefficient?

Mr. MENETREY. Inefficient, and we need more of them.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. White, why are insurance companies leaving California? What I am hearing from you is they will no longer provide policies for people in California. What is the reason behind that?

Mr. WHITE. I think there are a couple reasons. No. 1 is they need the higher premiums on the policies, and our California Insurance Commissioner is not allowing them to increase premiums.

But the second is the fuel load around all of our communities, we have to manage it. We are doing a good job on the private side, doing a lot of fuel management projects with Fire Wise and other organizations. But there are 50 million acres of Federal lands that are prohibiting a lot of work.

Mr. TIFFANY. What is the impact then if you can't get insurance? What are you hearing from individuals that have been denied having insurance or they have had their policies pulled?

Mr. WHITE. People are having to self-insure or go to the state's last resort of last insurance, which is the State FAIR Plan, which is highly unfair.

Mr. TIFFANY. Does that put an additional burden on the taxpayers of California?

Mr. WHITE. It is a huge burden on the taxpayers of California.

Mr. TIFFANY. You said something about the lack of management leads to actually more ESA listings. Did I hear that correctly, and could you explain that?

Mr. WHITE. Correct. When we lose this habitat for these ESA-listed species, it burns up in a fire, so does that species. And it takes the remaining little bit of acreage and just exacerbates the issue. And same with species that are not listed yet. When we start losing that habitat for those species, it is going to produce those species to be listed.

Mr. WHITE. So, as a result of a lack of proper management, proper forest management, we are actually seeing more ESA listings?

Mr. WHITE. Correct.

Mr. TIFFANY. And we all know the Endangered Species Act, since we are in this great state, is the Hotel California, where you may enter and never leave, right?

Mr. WHITE. Correct. Less than 5 percent leave.

Mr. TIFFANY. Would you rather have a government program supporting you or be allowed to manage, as we saw decades ago when we had loggers, miners, mills, farmers, ranchers, guides, and all the rest? Would you rather have a government handout, or would you rather be allowed to be able to manage your enterprise to be able to be successful?

Mr. WHITE. Definitely be able to manage our enterprise to be successful, not looking for a government handout.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Chairman, I would just close by saying *The Sacramento Bee*, I think you alluded to what they said in regards

to the environmental NGOs. They are actually destroying the environment all in the claim of protecting.

I think *The Sacramento Bee* should also send that editorial that they put out to the current President of the United States after what he did with another million acres here in the United States of America this past week down in Arizona, where once again we are going to see an area that is not going to be managed appropriately. I think both the national environmental groups, as well as this President, need to see what is happening, because it is destroying America.

And I would just say to all Americans out there, especially I think about my daughters who are very much environmentally conscious, like this generation is that is coming up that will lead America: You either change the management practices or places like Yosemite, one of the most beautiful places that we have here in America, are going to continue to be threatened.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, a freshman member of our Committee from the Central Valley.

Mr. Duarte, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DUARTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am so honored to be up here not only among the fellow Congressmen and the Chairman, but a dream team of foresters and leaders here in the Sierra Nevada that know firsthand what is going on. And it is a real privilege to be here today.

I will ask Mr. Bloom and Mr. Tripp, the folks involved in forest policy, the national forestlands, as I understand them from a Congressional Research Office report, are administered for sustained yields of multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, camping, hiking, hunting, et cetera, livestock grazing, timber harvesting, watershed protection, and fish and wildlife habitats.

Are those, in your opinions, compatible uses?

Mr. BLOOM. Absolutely.

Mr. DUARTE. If I add to that list preservation of wilderness, do we now have a list of completely compatible uses?

Mr. BLOOM. Yes, that is exactly what the national forests should be.

Mr. DUARTE. Preservation of wilderness.

Mr. BLOOM. Yes, that is part of it.

Mr. DUARTE. Are we concerned that some of the preservation strategies involve no logging roads, no thinning, no active management of the wilderness designated areas?

Mr. Daley, you are nodding. I will let you answer.

Dr. DALEY. It is one of my greatest frustrations, is in the effort to preserve, we don't conserve. In fact, we often destroy.

It is intended to do that, and I think well meaning very often that we need to preserve it. But when you begin to preserve, a good example you talked about that or mentioned that, quickly, is when you take out every road post and say we are preserving it, there is no access, how are you going to fight the fire if it is there? How are you going to have access?

I have watched the Forest Service step in after a fire where they had built fuel breaks that would allow them to protect the next fire

coming through, and what they have done is they have destroyed those fuel breaks because that wasn't natural.

So, what we did is we spent taxpayer dollars to build the fuel break and then taxpayer dollars to destroy the fuel break 6 months later. It is absolutely illogical.

Mr. DUARTE. Thank you.

Rural communities have been affected in many ways by forest policy. The preservation strategies have destroyed our logging mills, destroyed our loggers. If you want to go log and get busy and start fixing the forest with commercial systems, let some guys make a buck, can these family businesses attract the bank capital, see it as worthwhile to invest their own capital, attract the human capital they need?

How are we going to recapitalize these industries to get through the hundreds of millions of acres of backlogs of unhealthy forests that we have today?

I will take any answer.

Mr. TURNBOO. Well, a good example, we had 28 mills in El Dorado County. We now have one, which is a planing mill. We had numerous logging companies throughout El Dorado County. We managed our forest very, very well at that particular time. We took out 224,000 board feet, cut board feet of timber out of the national forest in 1994.

When all the regulations and everything were put in place, in 1995 we put out less than 10,000 cut board feet.

We need to bring logging back, but there has to be a guarantee. I have talked several times this year to Pacific. If they can't get a guarantee of how much stock they could get from the forest, they are not going to bring a mill back to El Dorado County.

So, there has to be a guarantee, they have to work together, because we need a mill back in El Dorado County. We really do.

We are working on a biomass facility right now, which is going to turn debris into biodiesel. It has already been put in place. It is a great thing that we have done. And this is one of the things I have talked about for several years.

Mr. DUARTE. Thank you.

So, who of our panel of guests here, speakers, is a multi-generational family operation?

Mr. TURNBOO. Well, yes, there you go. Yes.

Mr. DUARTE. So, we might destroy the Sequoias in our generation, we are trying not to, but we might, simply for not cleaning litter out from under them and putting a few firebreaks and thinning materials around them. Trees from the time of Christ, we might be the generation to destroy it.

We probably have destroyed to a great extent our forests. The fire map you showed, those are moonscapes. I have driven through them. I farm up there. It is horrifying moonscapes, actually worse than what we drive through here, going from parts of Yosemite. These are actually more severe.

Are our grandkids going to listen to us when we blame the Democrats?

Dr. DALEY. My comment would be, I wish we could quit blaming people and look for solutions.

Mr. DUARTE. Right.

Dr. DALEY. And if we can do that in California, which is not an easy place to do that, I would encourage federally to try to make that work.

We have people. I have the Newsom Administration, including four of their cabinet members and now the head of the U.S. Forest Service, who was head of Region 5, come up and tour with us. And until they saw it, they didn't get it. And now they are fans of grazing all of a sudden.

They still haven't solved the problems because SPI was with us. And SPI said, they said: Will you take this timber? They said: If you will guarantee us the timber, we will build a mill tomorrow. We will build mills wherever. And the Forest Service couldn't do it. That would be helpful.

Mr. DUARTE. So, the ping-pong match, you are saying, conservative policies, let's go get the material. Preservationist policies, let's stop everything. That absolutely makes impossible long-term capital investment, human capital, financial capital, social capital.

We have to get to a point where we respect the loggers, the ranchers as the true stewards of these lands or we are simply going to lose them to catastrophic fire.

Dr. DALEY. Correct.

Mr. TURNBOO. Our family, like I said, have been loggers for generations.

Mr. DUARTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman's time has expired.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from the state of Washington, who is also the Chair of the Western Caucus.

Mr. Newhouse, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to say thank you to all of our witnesses here today for coming and sharing with us your experiences and your perspectives.

As I look out over the crowd in front of me and watch the squirrels darting in between all your legs—I hope you are paying attention to that—what we can see from here is the sheer rock wall, just a majestic sight. And I have to think, not to lose the opportunity to compare, it is symbolic of sometimes the walls that we run into in Washington, DC when we try to make substantive changes and improvements.

But hopefully, the majesty that we are witness to with the trees and the mountains and the waterfalls also gives us hope and inspiration to do the hard work and be persistent and to keep at our job so that we can make those improvements.

We have heard a lot about the damages that have been seen here in California, here at Yosemite. I have to tell you, too, in my home district in central Washington State we are seeing it too. In fact, just last month we lost 7,000 acres in Klickitat County. There is a large fire up north near Oroville that is spreading across into Canada. Like somebody said, these fires know no borders.

We are also seeing the impact to human health, to our agricultural industry. As a wine grape grower, I can sympathize, Mr. White, with what you are seeing. We are seeing the exact same thing.

So, as you can tell, we are looking for answers, for solutions, to put our heads together—literally—to come up with what it is that we need to do to improve these situations that we face. These fires are becoming all too frequent, becoming all too often, and all too catastrophic.

One of the things that we have tools at our disposal are aerial fire trucks, and they are truly a huge asset when responding to these fires.

One of the things that I have learned is that response times, if there are expectations set, results improve. The National Fire Protection Association developed some standards, both nationally and internationally. My state, Washington, I think California has adopted similar standards, and they provide quick responses to save property, to save lives, to save animals.

I want to say too that many members on this Committee, many members of the Western Caucus have come forward with ideas to improve our response to wildfires and improve the situation as it relates to our management of our forests.

I just wanted to throw out a couple of questions. I was thinking about the county supervisors, but anybody, if you have any ideas, who would like to chime in as well.

Could you speak to some of the hurdles that you experience, regulatorily, laws that are in place that prevent responding to fires, that tie your hands behind your backs to where we cannot do what we need to do?

So, some specific things that we could take back with us to Washington, DC and make some positives changes.

I will start with you, Supervisor Menetrey.

Mr. MENETREY. Thank you.

As I mentioned in my oral testimony, the inaction on immediate suppression, I don't know that that is a law, but it is a decision that is made when a fire is ignited in the Forest Service. Our Ferguson Fire was ignited off a roadway down here, and because the forest ran for acres, and acres, and acres they let it go until it got so big that it was out of control.

So, I would say the Forest Service adopting an "immediate suppression" attitude would be huge for my community.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. So, some of these standards, like the NFPA standards, would be a good thing.

Mr. MENETREY. Yes.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Mr. Turnboo, any ideas?

Mr. TURNBOO. One of the things is Tom McClintock brought a bill that tailed around the county, and we are talking about the 10 a.m. policy, and that fire needs to be suppressed by 10 a.m. the next day.

We had this "let it burn" policy that has been in effect for quite a while. And I remember getting an e-mail from Randy Moore, which I got on the 23rd when the Caldor Fire was still burning. And basically he said that we are not going to go back to the "let it burn" policy, but we are also not going to go back to the 10 a.m. policy.

The deal with the "let it burn" policy has been a problem for decades, is what it has been, and that is why we have these

horrific fires, because we don't get the firefighters to be able to suppress these fires right away.

That is what happened in the Caldor Fire. In the Caldor Fire, there was no response for a few days. If they would have had a fuel break, if they would have put a fuel break in with dozers or whatever, they would have saved Grizzly Flats. But they didn't act on it. There are actually dispatch records, if you look up "Grizzly Flats burning," Channel 10 did a documentary.

The dispatch records—I got them because I asked for a FOIA request and I didn't get it because they said it was under investigation. But I got the records and it says that they told those people to go home. They called all these firefighters off at around 5 p.m., so there was nobody that would be out there to be able to save the residents in Grizzly Flats.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. We have to be able to act as fast as the fire.

Well, I appreciate very much all of your input. I wish we had more time. But, as Mr. Tripp said, this conversation will continue. And I look forward to working with you in into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Valadao, for 5 minutes.

Mr. VALADAO. Well, thank you, Chairman.

I want to first start by thanking the Chairman and this Committee. This is the second time I have had the honor of sitting on this Committee. I am a guest today because I am an appropriator, but it really means a lot to us in California that you have taken the time to at least do two of these in California. We did one on water a few months back, and now we are doing one on forestry. And the fact that we have a few Members from outside of the state to come out and listen as well is important.

The area that I have the honor of representing, we don't have forest fires in that part. And when we hear these stories, and, Mr. Turnboo, in your testimony, the letters from these constituents who have lost their family homes are devastating.

And we experience when those fires are happening, obviously, we are losing firefighters to come up and help fight some of these fires, but we are struggling with some air quality issues. We are struggling with a lot of issues that were affecting us, obviously, food quality, like the wine grape growers, obviously, the loss of production if it is not on your solar, but on anything else.

But it didn't really hit me until I heard, I think it was Mr. McClintock at some point or Mr. LaMalfa in Washington say, well, all that smoke you are burning are our folks' dreams, businesses, everything they had worked so hard to build.

And it really should, I think, affect a lot of people a lot more. It is going to have a devastating impact, obviously, on our health in the valley, it is going to have a devastating impact on our economy in the country, and it is going to have these things that are going to make some real differences. But you have homes that have been in families for hundreds of years that have burned.

And I know that a lot of it has been addressed up until this point where we talked about investment from Mr. Duarte. He brought

up, how do we attract some of this investment? And I know some of the regulations we are going to struggle with.

But what about the next generation? What are we doing to do?

And I wanted to address this question first off to Mr. White. You served as the Chairman of the California Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee. According to the U.S. Department of Ag, the average age of a farmer is 57 years old, which, as I am getting older, doesn't seem that old. It is getting there.

But we need to recruit and retain young farmers and ranchers. And when we see the inability to attract investment, the hurdles, as Mr. Newhouse explained, sometimes this feels like what we have to get through just to get into the business or to try to continue to do business in the state of California or in the Federal Government.

What are we doing? Are we doing enough to attract these young farmers? And when they see what we are dealing with, what their parents are dealing with, what their neighbors are dialing with, what do we need to do different to be able to attract the next generation and continue or at least try to enter into this world of agriculture, ranching, and play a role in trying to protect this beautiful state that we have?

Mr. WHITE. I think the younger generation, we see our parents and grandparents dealing with regulation. We are being overregulated to death, and it is killing our economies and the industry.

The forest is a great example, like we talked about, is all the sawmills have gone except for the guys that have private land and no one is going build a sawmill to take lumber out of our national Forest Service unless they can get contracts with the Forest Service, the Federal Government, to produce lumber out of that.

So, I think that is the biggest challenge, is the regulation and lack of knowing tomorrow from our government.

Mr. VALADAO. And, Dr. Daley, I think you are fourth generation?

Dr. DALEY. Fifth.

Mr. VALADAO. So, you are fifth.

Dr. DALEY. Yes.

Mr. VALADAO. So, your next generation, are they going to follow in your footsteps?

Dr. DALEY. I have one back on the ranch who probably questions, he is probably glad I am here today, that is easier, after he finishes the university. And I have a daughter who is a veterinarian and the youngest one, back from the Army, deciding what to do.

But this idea of a track, it has always been difficult in agriculture. I don't think that that has changed. I think there are still a lot of people committed and wanting to do so.

Frankly, it is capital as much as it is regulation. It is both, which makes it extremely challenging for young people to become engaged.

And then, if you are not smart enough to have only one child and you have three, there is a complexity of transitioning and legacy planning, which is an entirely different question as you move to the next level.

Mr. VALADAO. My family farm is in the Central Valley, and that is one of the things that we struggle with. We see consolidation everywhere.

And one of the things I always like to point out to my friends across the aisle is the amount of regulation, the amount of bureaucratic red tape, you have these farmers, you have these business owners who just can't deal with it anymore and they end up selling out.

And the guys that get bigger are the ones that can afford to hire the consultants, the attorneys, and all the different folks to get them across all those different types of whatever permit or whatever agency they need to deal with.

And it is the same thing that is affecting the regulations. It is the same thing that is affecting the investment from the business. But the small farmer just doesn't see that opportunity anymore, and it is just so difficult to push back. And we have to continue to work on that.

And I don't know if you have any closing ideas while I still have a few seconds.

Dr. DALEY. Well, just one of the things that you mentioned, real quickly.

The water quality issue I think is one that we haven't addressed. I am at Lake Oroville, Lake Shasta, state water projects, Federal water projects. All those dead animals, frankly, all that timber went into Lake Oroville, which goes throughout the state of California. So, it is everybody's problem, not just mine.

Mr. VALADAO. And in my part of California, when we had the devastation with all the water coming in, the flooding that ended up at the lake bottom, a lot of the water came in, brought a lot of debris. Some of it was trees and I saw TVs out in the middle of fields as well, and garbage bags, and things like that.

But all of that went over the top of the reservoirs on the overflows, went into the canals, and started to create these little mini-dams, which then changed the way water was flowing through some of those rivers. And then it would just flood out farms and communities, and I had entire communities under water. And it was frustrating to see.

And, sadly, it is all the same thing. It is regulation restricting us the ability to manage our waterways, or our mountains, our ranchlands, whatever it may be.

Mr. Chairman, again, I am out of time. I appreciate the opportunity, and I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

That leaves me with 5 minutes for questioning that I will yield to myself.

And to give you a heads-up, my questioning is going to be easy because I am going to give each of you about 30 seconds to tell us anything you didn't get to tell us or any final thoughts that you might have or suggestions you might have on top of the great suggestions you have already given us.

And I just want to let you know how much I appreciate each one of your testimonies.

Dr. Daley, you hit on something that was a little bit of a conundrum for me about having this hearing here where everything is

beautiful. And I talked to staff about, well, maybe we should go to one of these devastated areas.

But also to your point, I want us to convey a message of fixing it in the future; where we can be, not where we are. I think everybody that cares about this issue understands the devastation of these catastrophic wildfires.

And actually, as somebody who studied forestry in graduate school, as I drove up Highway 41 to the park and I saw the massive fire scars as we toured in the park yesterday, one of the most iconic places on the planet has been ravaged by wildfire. You get outside the park and the Forest Service, and it is even worse. We can do better than that.

Mr. Menetrey, you mentioned action/no action. We have had this in bills, and we can't get that passed through Congress. And it brings out an important point.

Forests are dynamic. They are living organisms. They change every day. They compete for growing space. They compete for water and nutrients.

And we can say we are not going to manage, but that is a management decision, and that is the management decision that has been made. That is something we will continue to push for. It needs to be in the NEPA analysis to say, OK, here is what happens if you do the management, here is what happens if you don't do the management. And right now the litigants are using that to their advantage because the courts do not consider what happens if you don't do the management.

Mr. White, you talked about losing 22 insurance companies in California. That is a major issue. Those companies didn't leave California because they don't want to make money. They left California because they can't make money writing policies. Their actuaries are telling them: You have to leave here, you have to leave a market, you have to shrink your business because you can't make a living here.

Mr. Tripp, you talked about tribal involvement that is so important; talked about affordable housing. The United States is the largest importer of timber in the world. While we leave it in the forest and let it burn up, we could be meeting housing needs.

There are so many things that we benefit from a healthy forest, and we have given agencies those authorities.

Mr. McClintock's bills that have proven that successful, sometimes they get utilized, sometimes they don't. The 2018 Farm Bill, we gave the Forest Service a 20-year stewardship contract agreement. Because of those companies that left, because there is no timber here, they are not going to build the 200 or 300 million-dollar facility if they can't get the timber to put in it.

So, we said you can sign a 20-year stewardship contract. We did that in 2018. There is yet to be one single 20-year stewardship contract executed by the Forest Service. It is frustrating. But we have to keep working, and we can't lose hope.

Mr. Tripp, we will start with you. Any last comments or observations?

Mr. TRIPP. Yes. Thank you.

I would just like to add that here, a year or two following the Slater Fire, there were some additional fires in and around the community of Happy Camp on the other side of the river.

The priority was to get those ones out next to the community. And that was a great, great decision. But part of that decision was to get out into the wilderness and put three fires out that had in areas that have burned four times in the past 20 years and were close as they can get to their natural fire regimes.

And that kind of decision can also be a mistake. Maybe in that situation with the amount of resources we had, getting those fires out small and fast is the right decision in that moment. But not having the ability to get back there in the fall and relight some of those places and allow fire to function in its role on that landscape is the type of thing that would lead to future devastating consequences.

So, I would just ask that we consider that side of the discussion as well as the conversation progresses.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Tripp.

Mr. Bloom, you made an important point about the Rim Fire, I believe it was the Rim Fire, and the failure to use fire retardant because of the scenic river. As you make your final remarks, could you tell everyone what the main ingredient in fire retardant is that we are so worried about?

Mr. BLOOM. It is mainly just a fertilizer.

The CHAIRMAN. Right. Exactly.

Mr. BLOOM. I would start with things that you can fix now.

I would amend NEPA to make thinning, grazing, and that sort of thing to reduce fuel loads easier to get through.

Change the Forest Service's mission statement in fire back to suppression so that we can stop these fires.

Definitely shorten the process to allow controlled burning and reduce fuel loads.

They also need to change their equipment hiring process. It is very messed up. The state has a pretty good model where they can hire local equipment when the fire first starts and then transition to their longer-term hire list, where the Feds seem to want to go off their list. So, they may have to bring a bulldozer from Arizona clear to California to work on the fire.

There are some things like that that we can change relatively soon that would make a big difference.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. White.

Mr. WHITE. I would say when the Forest Service allows these fires to get as big as they get and then they escape forest, national land, then they start calling CAL FIRE and the rest to come help them.

And when all those resources leave our communities to come up and help solve a problem that was created because we just let it keep burning in the national lands, that is when what happened with us in 2020 in Napa, we had the lightning fires and there were no resources. Everybody was out on multiple fires throughout the state. And it was farmers and ranchers with bulldozers and water trucks protecting houses. We lost some, but we saved a lot.

And I would just leave with you a wildfire is driven by three things: topography, weather, and fuel. We can't control the topography, we can't control the weather, but we can control the fuel, and we have not controlled the fuel.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Dr. Daley.

Dr. DALEY. We have had good discussions regarding pre-fire treatment: logging, thinning, mastication. We have talked very little about post-fire management, and that is extreme frustration.

We have also talked about NEPA reform. You folks, bless you for trying, but I have been talking about that every time I went to DC for a long time, and I don't see where there is movement. It just seems like a brick wall. So, we don't get change.

I would at least ask maybe minor things. Mr. McClintock addressed it briefly in terms of categorical exclusions. Why isn't there a categorical exclusion for post-fire remediation immediately, because that is what we are not doing.

In our landscape, the Forest Service has done nothing. They finally have a salvage. It is so late, they are just going to pile and burn 300 feet on either side of one road out of 40,000 acres. That is all they are going to treat because there is no categorical solution.

The Forest Service's hands are tied there. They said after a certain time we are going to have to go through NEPA. Well, at that point there is no value in the timber. The landscape has set itself up for catastrophic wildfire again.

I don't expect NEPA reform. I wish for it. I doubt it. I would like a categorical exclusion post-fire so we can quickly get in there, do what we need to do without waiting.

The CHAIRMAN. Good observation. Good forest management would say you just go regenerate the forest.

You may be surprised, in the debt limit bill we actually got some pretty significant NEPA reform, saying you can only go 1 year and 75 pages on an environmental assessment or a maximum of 2 years and up to 300 pages on an environmental impact statement. That is the law of the land right now. It was passed on a bipartisan basis. It will be interesting to see if that gets executed.

Supervisor Turnboo.

Mr. TURNBOO. I think we all need to be good stewards of the land, and I think that is what we got away from. And the problem is we need to bring logging back, good forest management, attack these fires. When it comes to these roads, especially in these forests, to make sure that we have adequate roads, especially if we do have a wildfire, to be able to get there.

During the Caldor Fire, there were a lot of roads that were washed out, and the Forest Service didn't maintain them. That was one of the reasons why they didn't get to the Caldor Fire quick enough. That is one of the reasons.

So, like I said, we just need to be good stewards, and we need to focus on that.

The CHAIRMAN. Supervisor Menetrey.

Mr. MENETREY. Thank you, sir.

Yes, I think that where the forest is approachable for some of the things that we have talked about—mechanical thinning, controlled burns, forest management—that is awesome.

But in the areas—and you guys have been up here a couple days now—where the terrain doesn't allow for access, again, I will say it, we need immediate suppression. Because once that fire gets big, the smoke takes over, the air assets can't see where they need to go, and it is just disastrous.

So, I think it is an all-of-the-above activity. But suppression is my big deal, immediate.

Thank you all for being here. We really appreciate it.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

And I would encourage members of the public and the audience to fill out comment cards on the table on the left when you leave today. And I would again like to thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions.

Members of the Committee may have some additional questions for our witnesses, and we will ask that they respond to these in writing.

Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Committee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, August 16, 2023. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for those responses.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee on Natural Resources stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

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