

TRIBUTE TO DR. WALLY COVINGTON

Ms. MCSALLY. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize one of the most influential and well-known forest ecologists in the Nation, Dr. Wally Covington of Flagstaff, AZ.

Last month, Dr. Covington retired from his current position as regents' professor at the School of Forestry and the executive director of the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University.

When we talk about the wildfire crisis afflicting the West, we frequently reference the need to thin our forests of the enormous number of small, dead, and dying trees that have fueled some of largest, deadliest, and most destructive mega fires ever seen in the United States.

In my home State of Arizona, about one-quarter of our pine forests have been impacted by fire over the past two decades. In 2011, the largest wildfire in State history, the Wallow Fire, incinerated over a half million acres in a matter of weeks before finally burning out. And a nation mourned the loss of 19 brave wildland firefighters from Prescott, AZ, who gave their lives battling the Yarnell Hill Fire in 2013.

These fires burn so hot and fast that they barrel through rural communities, insatiably consuming property in its path and, sometimes, human life too.

We recognize that the fuel load is too high in many forests and that prescribed fires and fuel breaks alone are not enough to prevent mega-fires that crown atop forest canopies.

Today, it is common sense that our fire-prone public lands need to be restored to their natural, fire-adapted state. It is difficult to imagine how this conventional wisdom shared across both sides of the aisle, and among the timber industry and environmental groups alike, was foreign, controversial, and, frankly, heretical only two decades ago. It was Dr. Covington's applied research in forest ecology and his tireless advocacy that showed us how reducing tree density through timber harvesting is not only beneficial, but also necessary if we want to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires.

So when we talk about forest thinning, the country should know just how influential Dr. Wally Covington's contributions were to the practice of forest ecosystem restoration.

Let me share a little bit of Dr. Covington's story with you. From a young age, Wally was exposed to the wonders of the great outdoors by his parents who first met and fell in love in Flagstaff. They instilled in him a profound appreciation for nature and a humbling perspective on humanity's impact on the land. At his father's urging, Wally studied the works of conservationist Aldo Leopold, who is regarded as the founder of the wilderness preservation movement and the philosophy of "land ethics," which espouses the belief that man is not a conqueror of his environment, but a unique component of it.

Later, Wally graduated from the University of North Texas with a degree in biology, and he planned to become a physician in pediatric oncology. However, the emotional toll of working with children with cancer left Wally disheartened. He departed medical school never to return. Still, that heart-wrenching experience taught Wally that he was a healer.

Shaped by the burgeoning environmental movement of the 1970s, Wally answered another calling. He decided to pursue a master's in ecology from the University of New Mexico. It wasn't long before Wally's academic achievements led him to Yale University where he earned a doctorate in forestry in 1976.

Dr. Covington was already an accomplished forest ecologist by the time he joined NAU. At Yale, he developed an innovative theory for predicting the carbon budgets of unharvested forests, a calculation known as "Covington's curve" that is still widely used in modern forestry.

His next achievement, however, would transform how we view and manage our forestlands. For some time, Wally had been studying ponderosa pine trees, a type of evergreen species that dominates the landscape in the West. These iconic conifers span more than 27 million acres in the United States. Wally observed that our Nation's pine forests were out of balance, unhealthy, and highly susceptible to drought, insect infestation, and disease. A majority of the mega-fires or "conflagrations" impacting northern California, Montana, Arizona, and elsewhere were occurring in ponderosa pine forests.

As a forest ecologist, Wally understood that fire plays a natural role in our forests. Historically, in North America, low intensity ground fire led to large, mature pine trees and forests that are naturally adapted to withstand fire. But modern wildfires in the West were now burning with such ferocious intensity that even the sturdiest of pine trees would literally boil to the point of exploding. Postfire conditions were no longer the regenerative force that ecologists had once studied. Soils were damaged, taking years to replenish their nutrients, and watersheds were more likely to experience long-term flooding and erosion.

Wally once poignantly described the situation in an article he authored in the journal *Nature* in 2002: "The dry forest ecosystems of the American West, especially those once dominated by open ponderosa pine forests, are in widespread collapse. We are now witnessing sudden leaps in aberrant ecosystem behavior long predicted by ecologists and conservation professionals. Trends over the past half-century show that the frequency, intensity and size of wildfires will increase—by orders of magnitude—the loss of biological diversity, property and human lives for many generations to come."

Like any good healer, Dr. Covington worked tirelessly to diagnose the ill-

ness and devise a cure. As part of his research, Wally pored through historical records, old photographs, and land surveys dating back to the turn of the century. He listened to Native American Tribal members, the first inhabitants of our forests, who shared stories told and retold through the generations about elk and deer hunts in open canopied forests teeming with bountiful grasslands. Wally discovered that, in a very short time, about 50 years, the forest landscape of the West had substantially changed.

He hypothesized, correctly, that man's presence had transformed our once fire-adapted, low-density forests into overstocked tinderboxes. Before there was a Forest Service, before westward expansion brought pioneers and homesteaders, the land, he estimated, supported around 50 to 100 pine trees per acre. In contrast, today's modern forests host roughly 300 percent more trees—sometimes as much as 1,000 trees per acre—a number far greater than the natural ecosystem can support. This meant that the West was overloaded with a dangerous amount of kindling fuel.

To prove his theory, Wally ran experiments. Beginning in 1992, on a modest 10-acre parcel of Forest Service land in the Gus Pearson Natural Area, Wally established three test plots. The first plot was used as the control, its post-settlement state preserved as-is. The second plot was thinned of excess pine trees. On the third plot, the trees were thinned to simulate pre-settlement conditions and then subjected to prescribed fire, the kind of controlled burns routinely used by the Forest Service to clear our low-lying fuels from the forest floor.

His test showed that fire behavior dramatically decreased on the plot that was thinned. Trees didn't suffer the same trauma found on the other two plots and in fact responded positively by producing increased resin, which meant increased resistance to bark beetle infestation. Also, the number of species and amount of native grasses and plants increased improving both forage and habitat quality. Wally had successfully conducted the first science-based forest restoration project in history.

Dr. Covington took his findings to Congress, the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service, and the National Academy of Sciences. He met with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt under the Clinton administration and, later, Secretary Gale Norton under the George W. Bush administration, to convince them to implement forest restoration treatments. In many of his meetings, he would echo the old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

They listened, and Congress listened, as did my Arizona predecessors in the Senate. In 2003, he worked with Senator Jon Kyl to enact legislation like the Health Forests Restoration Act and also established the congressionally chartered Southwest Ecological

Restoration Institutes at NAU, Colorado State University, and New Mexico Highlands University, which assist the Forest Service in developing restoration projects across millions of acres of land.

Today, the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior are working to mechanically thin millions of acres of forestlands across the West to make our forests more resilient to fire. It is a slow, expensive, and time-consuming prospect to reverse 50 years of forest mismanagement across a territory as vast as the United States, but the reward is worth it. In doing so, we are saving our forests, our homes, and human lives.

I cannot overstate Dr. Covington's tremendous contribution to the field of forest ecology. Had it not been for Wally's work, his compassion for healing our unhealthy forests, and his drive to educate policymakers on the sound science behind forest restoration, I suspect our forests would be in far worse shape today. I am proud to recognize Dr. Covington, a fellow Arizonan. Our Nation owes Wally a debt of gratitude that we can never repay.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO RYAN MICOZZI

• Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I would like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to Ryan for his hard work as an intern in the Senate Republican Conference. I recognize his efforts and contributions to my office, as well as to the State of Wyoming.

Ryan is a native of New York. He is a graduate of the University of Buffalo, where he studied political science and business administration: human resources. He has demonstrated a strong work ethic, which has made him an invaluable asset to our office. The quality of his work is reflected in his great efforts over the last several months.

I want to thank Ryan for the dedication he has shown while working for me and my staff. It is a pleasure to have him as part of our team. I know he will have continued success with all of his future endeavors. I wish him all my best on his journey.●

TRIBUTE TO JOHN FERRIOLA

• Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the career and service of John Ferriola, who will retire at the end of this year after serving Nucor Steel for nearly three decades. Mr. Ferriola has served as CEO since 2013, and under his leadership, the company has grown and created thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs here in the U.S. He worked to upgrade Nucor's facility in Marion, OH, with a new rolling mill that began operating this year.

John has been a passionate advocate for American manufacturing and for a

fairer trade policy that works for American workers and businesses. We worked together to pass the Leveling the Playing Field Act in 2015, the first strengthening of our trade remedy laws in more than two decades. That law has helped us win key trade cases for Ohio steel companies over the past 4 years.

When John started at Nucor in 1991, it was a small steel company with just two mills. Last year, Nucor was the largest steel producer in the United States. John understands that workers in Ohio and around the U.S. are the engine behind that success. I look forward to continuing to our fight together for a fair trade policy that puts American workers first, and I wish John Ferriola all the best in his retirement.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Roberts, one of his secretaries.

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

REPORT RELATIVE TO AN ALTERNATIVE PLAN FOR PAY ADJUSTMENTS FOR CIVILIAN FEDERAL EMPLOYEES COVERED BY THE GENERAL SCHEDULE AND CERTAIN OTHER PAY SYSTEMS IN JANUARY 2021—PM 44

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs:

To the Congress of the United States:

I am transmitting an alternative plan for pay adjustments for civilian Federal employees covered by the General Schedule and certain other pay systems in January 2021.

Title 5, United States Code, authorizes me to implement alternative plans for pay adjustments for civilian Federal employees covered by the General Schedule and certain other pay systems if, because of “national emergency or serious economic conditions affecting the general welfare,” I view the increases that would otherwise take effect as inappropriate.

Under current law, locality pay increases averaging 20.67 percent, costing \$21 billion in the first year alone, would go into effect in January 2021, in addition to a 2.5 percent across-the-board increase for the base General Schedule.

We must maintain efforts to put our Nation on a fiscally sustainable course; Federal agency budgets cannot sustain such increases. Accordingly, I have determined that it is appropriate to exercise my authority to set alternative pay adjustments for 2021 pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 5303(b) and 5 U.S.C. 5304a.

Specifically, I have determined that for 2021 the across-the-board base pay increase will be limited to 1.0 percent and locality pay percentages will remain at their 2020 levels. This alternative pay plan decision will not materially affect our ability to attract and retain a well-qualified Federal workforce.

As noted in my Budget for Fiscal Year 2021, our pay system must reform to align with mission-critical recruitment and retention goals, and to reward employees whose performance provides value for the American people.

For this purpose, my Budget further directs agencies to increase awards spending in FY 2021 by an amount equal to no less than 1 percent of total salary spending. My Administration will continue to support reforms that advance these aims.

The adjustment described above shall take effect on the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning on or after January 1, 2021.

DONALD J. TRUMP,
THE WHITE HOUSE, February 10, 2020.

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

BUDGET OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021—PM 45

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred jointly, pursuant to the order of January 30, 1975, as modified by the order of April 11, 1986; to the Committees on Appropriations; and the Budget:

To the Congress of the United States:

Over the past 3 years, my Administration has worked tirelessly to restore America's economic strength. We have ended the war on American workers and stopped the assault on American industry, launching an economic boom the likes of which we have never seen before.

While our incredible economic turnaround came as a shock to most career politicians in Washington, it is no surprise to millions of hard-working families across the Nation. Their natural talent, ingenuity, and strength simply needed an opportunity to flourish, free from the massive regulations and taxes heaped upon them by their Government.

As my Administration continues to remove these burdens, our economy continues to surpass expectations. We are growing faster than the experts thought possible. The unemployment rate is at 3.5 percent, the lowest it has been in 50 years. And more Americans are working today than at any point in our history.

Today's tremendous job market is leading employers to realize the vast potential of many individuals they previously overlooked. Over the past 3