

**EXAMINING THE PRESIDENT'S  
FY 2025 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE  
U.S. FOREST SERVICE**

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
**NATURAL RESOURCES**  
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

**To:** House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members  
**From:** Subcommittee on Federal Lands—Aniela Butler and Brandon Miller  
(Aniela@mail.house.gov and Brandon.Miller@mail.house.gov; x6-7736)  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 4, 2024  
**Subject:** Oversight Hearing on “*Examining the President’s FY 2025 Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service*”

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The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold an oversight hearing on “*Examining the President’s FY 2025 Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service*” on **Tuesday, June 4, 2024, at 10:15 a.m. in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Will Rodriguez (Will.Rodriguez@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Monday, June 3, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

#### **I. KEY MESSAGES**

- Despite receiving billions of dollars in recent years, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is still struggling to confront the myriad challenges facing the agency, most notably the historic wildfire crisis that has destroyed lives and property, degraded air and water quality, and irreparably damaged millions of acres of wildlife habitat.
- The USFS budget once again fails to address systemic impediments to addressing the wildfire crisis, while seeking significant increases in funding. Burdensome regulations and frivolous litigation remain the primary obstacles blocking better forest management outcomes.
- This hearing will provide an opportunity to hold the USFS accountable and get answers on the agency’s plans to confront our nation’s wildfire crisis, increase timber production, improve forest health, reduce the deferred maintenance backlog, and address the effects of Biden’s border security failures on our nation’s forests.

#### **II. WITNESSES**

- **Mr. Randy Moore**, Chief, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC.

#### **III. BACKGROUND**

*Budget Overview*—Chief Randy Moore will be appearing before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands to discuss the Biden administration’s fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The USFS’s FY 2025 budget requests \$8.9 billion in discretionary funding (including roughly \$2.4 billion for the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund), which reflects a \$658 million increase over

FY 2024 enacted levels.<sup>1</sup> The USFS manages 193 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands, including 154 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands across 9 USFS Regions.<sup>2</sup> Most of these lands are located in our western states. The USFS manages more federal land in the eastern United States than all the other land management agencies combined.<sup>3</sup> Under the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act, NFS lands are to be managed for timber production, outdoor recreation, energy and mineral development, livestock grazing, watershed protection, and wildlife habitat.<sup>4</sup> Every year, NFS lands host roughly 159 million visitors, contributing about \$15.2 billion to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>5</sup>

Discretionary Account	FY 2023 Actual	FY 2024 Estimated	FY 2025 Request	Change Between FY 2024 and FY 2025
Wildland Fire Management	\$2.116 billion	\$2.116 billion	\$2.55 billion	+\$434 million
National Forest System	\$1.974 billion	\$1.974 billion	\$2.007 billion	+\$33 million
Capital Improvement and Maintenance	\$158.05 million	\$158.05 million	\$158 million	-\$48,000
Forest and Rangeland Research	\$307 million	\$307 million	\$315 million	+\$8 million
State, Private, and Tribal Forestry	\$337 million	\$337 million	\$305 million	-\$32 million
Forest Service Operations	\$1.152 billion	\$1.152 billion	\$1.187 billion	+\$25 million
Land Acquisition	\$814,000	\$814,000	\$814,000	-
Other Appropriations	\$3.6 million	\$2.8 million	\$4.8 million	+\$2 million
<b>Total (Discretionary)</b>	<b>\$6.05 billion</b>	<b>\$6.05 billion</b>	<b>\$6.5 billion</b>	<b>+\$450 million</b>
Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund	\$2.21 billion	\$2.21 billion	\$2.39 billion	+\$180 million
<b>Total (Discretionary + Reserve Fund)</b>	<b>\$8.26 billion</b>	<b>\$8.26 billion</b>	<b>\$8.9 billion</b>	<b>+\$658.5 million</b>

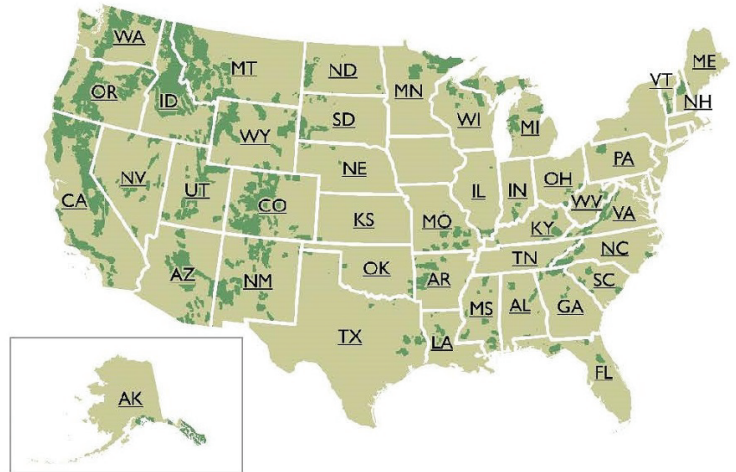
<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, "Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification", <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Katie Hoover, *et al.*, "Federal Lands and Related Resources: Overview and Selected Issues for the 118th Congress," Congressional Research Service, February 24, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R43429>. U.S. Forest Service, "Forest Service Regions", <https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/regions/index.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup> Katie Hoover & Anne A. Riddle, "National Forest System Management: Overview and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, May 18, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43872>.

<sup>4</sup> 16 U.S.C. § 52.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, "Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification", <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.



USFS managed lands. **Source:** United States Geological Survey, no date.

**Wildfire Crisis**—Since 2000, over 164 million acres have been damaged by wildfire in the U.S., a collective area that is roughly three times the size of the entire state of Utah.<sup>6</sup> Prior to 2015, the United States never had more than 10 million acres burn in a single wildfire season. In the past decade, however, the country has now hit that ominous mark three times during the worst wildfire seasons on record (2015, 2017, and 2020).<sup>7</sup> This crisis has wreaked havoc on landscapes and communities across the western United States. Catastrophic wildfires destroyed lives and property, degraded air and water quality, and irreparably damaged millions of acres of wildlife habitat. This year, more than 1.86 million acres have burned, largely in Texas and Oklahoma during February wildfires.<sup>8</sup> Historically, the USFS has carried out only 2 million acres of treatments per year.<sup>9</sup> At this disappointing rate, it would take the USFS over 30 years to treat the estimated 63 million acres of NFS land at risk for wildfire.<sup>10</sup>

Despite receiving roughly \$11.5 billion from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the USFS has failed to meaningfully ramp up the number of acres treated.<sup>11</sup> In fact, for the second year in a row, the USFS budget proposes treating *fewer* acres than the year prior. The FY 2025 budget seeks \$207 million for hazardous fuels reduction, consistent with the FY 2024 enacted amount.<sup>12</sup> Although the request for funding is constant, the USFS treatment goal for FY 2025 is 4 million acres, or 200,000 acres less than the previous year's target.<sup>13</sup> This puts the agency off by roughly 2 million acres *from their own estimates* regarding how much land needs to be treated in the 10-year “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis” Strategy.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> NIFC, “Wildfires and Acres,” <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics/wildfires>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> National Interagency Fire Center, “National Fire News,” <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/nfn>.

<sup>9</sup> PERC, “Does Environmental Review Worsen the Wildfire Crisis,” Eric Edwards, Sara Sutherland, June 14, 2022, <https://perc.org/2022/06/14/does-environmental-review-worsen-the-wildfire-crisis/>.

<sup>10</sup> Katie Hoover & Anne A. Riddle, “Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020),” October 28, 2020, CRS, R46583, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46583>.

<sup>11</sup> P.L. 117-58. P.L. 117-169.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> QFR Response to Chairman Westerman, April 1, 2024, on file with the Committee.

Year	Acres Treated
FY 2017	2.75 million
FY 2018	3.40 million
FY 2019	2.90 million
FY 2020	2.65 million
FY 2021	3.70 million
FY 2022	3.21 million
FY 2023	4.3 million
<i>FY 2024 (target)</i>	<i>4.20 million</i>
<i>FY 2025 (target)</i>	<i>4.0 million</i>

**Source:** Data compiled by HNRC Majority Staff from USFS Budget Justifications, FY 2017-FY 2025.

Even this lackluster target is likely inflated, though, as the budget fails to address investigative reporting that uncovered the USFS has overstated its treatment numbers by more than 20 percent.<sup>15</sup> The discrepancy stems from the USFS recording multiple treatments (i.e., mechanical thinning, prescribed burning, chipping and piling, etc.) on the same acre separately as if multiple acres had been treated.

The House Committee on Natural Resources has advanced legislation to address inaccurate reporting of treated acres by USFS. H.R. 1567, introduced by Subcommittee on Federal Lands Chairman Tom Tiffany (R-WI), requires the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of the Interior to submit accurate reports regarding hazardous fuels reduction activity and implement standardized procedures for tracking data related to such activities. The legislation was reported by the Committee on Natural Resources by unanimous consent on April 28, 2023, and was passed by the House of Representatives by a vote of 406 to 4 on September 13, 2023.

*Wildland Fire Management*—As wildfire seasons have grown in both length and severity, so too have wildland fire management costs. In the last decade, suppression costs averaged over \$3 billion per year across the federal land management agencies.<sup>16</sup> The FY 2025 budget proposes \$2.6 billion for Wildland Fire Management activities, an increase of \$433 million from the FY 2024 enacted level.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the FY 2025 budget proposes shifting more than half of that total—approximately \$1.3 billion designated for wildfire pre-suppression and suppression activities and firefighter salaries—from base discretionary to emergency funding.<sup>18</sup> In so doing, the FY 2025 budget would free up base discretionary funding for pet projects of the Biden Administration, including the purchase of zero-emission vehicles and associated charging infrastructure.<sup>19</sup> This budgetary gimmick would divert funding from necessary wildfire management activities and appears to be an attempted evasion of effective congressional oversight and responsible budgeting practices.

<sup>15</sup> NBC News, “The Forest Service is overstating its wildfire prevention progress to Congress despite decades of warning not to”, Adiel Kaplan, Monica Hersher, August 9, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/forest-service-overstating-wildfire-prevention-progress-congress-decad-rcna41576>.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Economic risks: Forest Service estimates costs of fighting wildfires in a hotter future”, Sarah Farmer and Jenni Moore Myers, May 14, 2024, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/economic-risks-forest-service-estimates-costs-fighting-wildfires-hotter-future#:~:text=Wildfire%20suppression%20is%20costly.,than%20%243%20billion%20per%20year>.

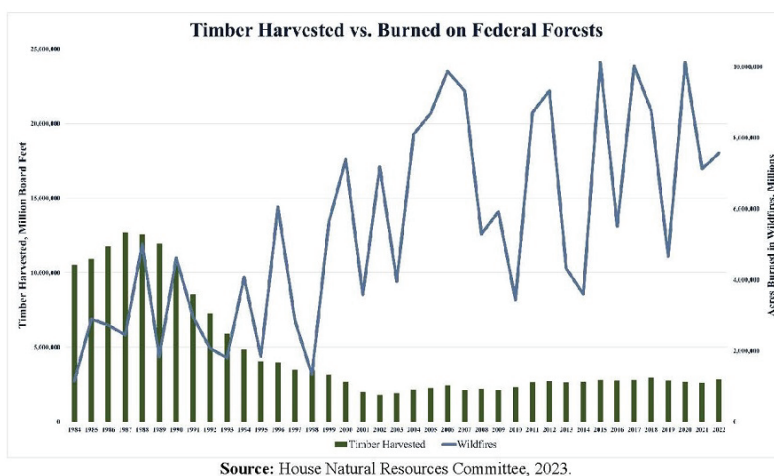
<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*



**Timber Targets**—The USFS failed to hit its timber target in FY 2024 by roughly 260 million board feet, selling only 3.143 billion board feet (BBF).<sup>20</sup> Concerningly, the USFS lowered its timber target from 3.4 BBF to 3.2 BBF for the next two years.<sup>21</sup> This troubling trajectory for treatment and timber targets casts doubt on the USFS's wildfire risk reduction efforts and reflects an ongoing threat to sawmill infrastructure. Since 2000, over 1,500 sawmills, or roughly one-third of the total number of sawmills in operation at that time, have closed or curtailed capacity.<sup>22</sup> The loss of this critically important infrastructure and mill capacity greatly hampers efforts to process hazardous fuels, thus exacerbating the wildfire crisis. A lack of reliable federal timber is consistently cited as a primary cause behind numerous mill closures in western states with large amounts of federal land. Just last month, in April 2024, C&D Lumber, which began operations in southern Oregon in 1890, announced its permanent closure, citing “timber supply issues” among other challenges, that “have made it impossible for us to envision a sustainable future for the company.”<sup>23</sup>



Without a stable supply of timber, investments in new sawmills, which often cost more than \$100 million, make little sense for private industry.<sup>24</sup> The FY 2025 Budget includes \$43 million to support Forest Products, and the USFS has continued to emphasize its support to expand markets for through Wood Innovations grants. Last year, USFS used \$48 million to fund 104 Wood Innovations projects focused on expanding wood products and markets.<sup>25</sup> While innovative uses for wood products are an important pursuit, they are not a replacement for the Forest Service's need to do a better job harvesting timber resources to meet the market's current demands.

**Wildfire Prevention Studies**—Despite heightened federal expenditures on suppression activities, wildfires continue to increase in size and severity across the U.S.<sup>26</sup> Investments in wildfire prevention, including through scientific studies of at-risk

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> Congressional Budget Office, “Wildfires”, June 2022, <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58212>.

<sup>23</sup> KQEN News Radio, “C&D Lumber Announces Permanent Closure”, April 5, 2024, <https://kqennewsradio.com/2024/04/05/cd-lumber-announces-permanent-closure/>.

<sup>24</sup> The Advocate, “More than half a billion investment in sawmills planned across Louisiana amid higher lumber prices”, Kristen Mosbrucker, July 26, 2021, <https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/business/more-than-half-a-billion-investment-in-sawmills-planned-across-louisiana-amid-higher-lumber-prices/article-600c8bac-ee3e-11eb-8075-cbf03f7e098e.html>.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.uyk

<sup>26</sup> Jessica Blackband, “Firefighting Workforce Benefits From FY25 Budget Request But Sustained Investments Are Necessary To Address The Wildfire Crisis,” Federation of American Scientists, April 16, 2024, <https://fas.org/publication/fy25-wildfire-budget/>.

landscapes, are a crucial step toward addressing the growing crisis.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the USFS FY 2025 budget request, while proposing significant funding increases for other budget items, misses opportunities to sustain needed prevention efforts. The Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP), for example, “provides funding and science delivery for scientific studies associated with managing wildland fire, fuels, and fire-impacted ecosystems to respond to emerging needs of wildland fire and land managers, practitioners, and policymakers from local to national levels.”<sup>28</sup> As such, the JFSP aims to function as a “primary clearinghouse” for cutting-edge “fire science information and activities throughout the nation.”<sup>29</sup> Although this program promises many prevention-related benefits, the USFS proposes to cut funding for the JFSP for FY 2025.<sup>30</sup>

*State, Private, and Tribal Forestry*—Wildfires do not respect manmade boundaries, so collaboration with states, tribes, local communities, and other stakeholders is critical. The State, Private, and Tribal Forestry organization within the USFS facilitates much of this cross-boundary work.<sup>31</sup> This organization provides resources and assistance to non-federal stakeholders, focusing on improving forest health and protecting communities from wildfires.<sup>32</sup> The FY 2025 budget decreases that account by roughly \$32 million, dropping by \$305 million below FY 2024.<sup>33</sup>

*Reforestation*—In addition to addressing existing wildfire threats, there is a clear need to restore previous landscapes damaged by wildfire. In the last 20 years, the United States lost an average of 7 million acres per year to catastrophic wildfires, more than double the average seen during the 1990’s.<sup>34</sup> Many of these catastrophic wildfires burn so severely that natural regeneration is impossible. If these lands are not artificially regenerated (i.e., by planting trees), the lands will eventually transition from forests to shrublands. In total, the USFS identified a 4 million-acre reforestation backlog, 80 percent of which is related to catastrophic wildfires.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, the agency has only addressed less than 6 percent of its post-wildfire planting needs annually.<sup>36</sup> The IIJA removed the \$30 million cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF), which receives funds from the collection of tariffs on certain wood-product imports to fund reforestation efforts on public lands.<sup>37</sup> The USFS budget notes that collections decreased to \$158 million from \$261 million in FY 2024.<sup>38</sup> The budget seeks \$140 million to increase “organizational capacity in nursery, genetics, and reforestation programs.”<sup>39</sup>

Even though the USFS is requesting additional money for reforestation, the agency’s reforested acreage target is lowered in the FY 2025 budget. The USFS aims to complete roughly 1.8 million acres of reforestation over the next 10 years.<sup>40</sup> Despite the considerable increase in funding through the RTF, this reforestation goal is a decrease from before the cap was removed when the agency was averaging reforestation on 190,000 acres annually.<sup>41</sup> More needs to be done to address the estimated 4-million-acre reforestation backlog.<sup>42</sup> Further, while reforestation is an important component of healthy forest management, failing to properly thin and manage forests and utilize wood products will mean that replanted trees will add fuel to future wildfires.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “State, Private, and Tribal Forestry”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/state-private-forestry>

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Wildfire Statistics”, Katie Hoover, June 1, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search&guid=b82a4d954677449b918a65ece823396f&index=0>.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Reforestation Strategy,” July 2022, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Reforestation Strategy,” July 2022, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/Reforestation-Strategy.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “American Forests Partners with USDA Forest Service to Expand Reforestation across National Forests”, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/12/06/american-forests-partners-usda-forest-service-expand-reforestation>.

*Wildland Firefighter Pay*—The IIJA provided \$600 million to increase the base firefighter salary by \$20,000 (or 50 percent of their current salary, whichever is lesser).<sup>43</sup> Under the IIJA, \$480 million of this increase was for the USFS wildland firefighters, while \$120 million was for the Department of the Interior (DOI).<sup>44</sup> Congress has extended this pay increase four times, and the current extension will last through the end of FY 2024.<sup>45</sup> To address wildland firefighter pay, the USFS FY 2025 budget includes \$2.6 billion for Wildland Fire Management Activities, a \$433 million increase from the FY 2024 level.<sup>46</sup> The budget also includes \$216 million for a permanent pay increase for wildland firefighters.<sup>47</sup> An increase of \$69 million is requested for cost of living adjustments, and \$136 million to increase Federal firefighting capacity.<sup>48</sup> Finally, this budget seeks a \$10 million investment to support health and wellbeing services for wildland firefighters.<sup>49</sup>

Brave wildland firefighters, who routinely put their safety and lives on the line to protect vulnerable communities, undoubtedly deserve fair compensation. Unfortunately, the USFS has consistently failed to transparently account for salaries and expenses, complicating this issue. The FY 2025 budget fails once again to identify an offset for any pay increases and suggests in numerous instances that the agency may not even have enough money to pay normal salaries. For example, the budget frequently states: “*The Forest Service will need to rely on other funding sources for Salaries and Expenses and balance hiring actions and attrition rates to stay within appropriations in the operational year.*”<sup>50</sup> The budget does not provide any further analysis to accompany this vague statement, causing confusion about whether the agency may need to request supplemental funds to continue normal operations. This curious lack of detail compounds previous concerns raised by Congress that the USFS had inaccurately asserted wildland firefighters would face a pay cut when the agency had over \$100 million remaining to pay firefighter salaries.<sup>51</sup>

*Old Growth and Mature Forests*—In April 2022, President Biden issued Executive Order 14072, directing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and DOI to define, identify, and inventory “mature and old growth forests” on public lands and subsequently develop policies to protect those forests.<sup>52</sup> The interagency mature and old growth initiative began in July 2022 with a Federal Register Notice and public comment period, resulting in roughly 4,000 comments and more than 100,000 signatures on various form letters from across the country.<sup>53</sup> In April 2023, the USFS published an “initial draft” seeking to define and inventory “old-growth and mature forests” and even convened a “Definition Development Team.”<sup>54</sup> Yet all these efforts have failed to create a single, coherent definition for “old-growth” or “mature” forests. This is a predictable shortcoming, as no standard definition exists for “old-growth forests” and “mature forests,” and they are not terms recognized in the scientific practice of forestry. Despite this lack of clear definitions, the report identified 91 million acres of “old-growth and mature” forested lands on NFS lands, comprising 63 percent of all land managed by the USFS.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Update: Wildland firefighter pay, classification in infrastructure law”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/wildland-firefighter-pay-classification-infrastructure-law>.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “March 2024 firefighter pay, series update”, March 25, 2024, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/delivering-mission/excel/firefighter-pay>.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* 291-37.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Catenacci, “Biden admin caught pushing misleading narrative on dire budget warnings impacting firefighters, data shows,” Fox News, September 22, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-admin-caught-pushing-misleading-narrative-dire-budget-firefighters-data>.

<sup>52</sup> Executive Office of the President [Joseph Biden]. Executive Order 14072, “Strengthening the Nation’s Forests, Communities, and Local Economies.” April 20, 2023. 87 F.R. 24851, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-04-27/pdf/2022-09138.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, “Request for Information (RFI) on Federal Old-growth and Mature Forests”, July 15, 2024, 87 FR 42493, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/07/15/2022-15185/request-for-information-rfi-on-federal-old-growth-and-mature-forests>.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, “Mature and Old-Growth Forests: Definition, Identification, and Initial Inventory on Lands Managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management”, April 2023, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/mature-and-old-growth-forests-tech.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

The Biden administration ultimately admitted that “these ‘definitions’ are considered dynamic, not static, and thus are subject to refinement as new information is incorporated (working definitions).”<sup>56</sup> Despite lacking a real definition, the administration released an introductory report in January that identified wildfire, insects, and diseases as the leading threats to mature and old-growth forests and even admitted that “tree cutting” is a minor threat that generally “improved or maintained” the stands that had been managed.<sup>57</sup> Continuing this misguided and incomplete effort, the USFS published a Notice of Intent to amend all 128 national forest land management plans to provide direction on how to manage, conserve, and steward old-growth forest conditions.<sup>58</sup> A draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected this summer, and the amendment process is expected to be completed in early 2025.<sup>59</sup> This misguided effort has unquestionably diverted time and energy away from addressing the overwhelming wildfire crisis that is the true threat to forest stands of every age class. This forest plan amendment process to protect so-called “old growth forests” poses serious threats to forest health and multiple use management. Committee Republicans are continuing to fight against this unnecessary and unhelpful endeavor.

*30x30 Initiative and Locking Up Lands*—The Biden administration continues to conduct orchestrated attacks on public lands, using a variety of tools to further the 30x30 agenda. These preservationist policies limit access, hurt local economies, and remove uses of public lands that benefit Americans. The Biden budget continues to support the 30x30 Initiative, including through several references in the USFS budget.<sup>60</sup> On May 6, 2021, the USDA and other federal departments released an “interim” report titled “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful,” which outlined a 10-year campaign to preserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.<sup>61</sup> In this report, the administration proposed an American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas. Nearly three years later, the administration finally published this atlas, even though the USFS has already been implementing 30x30 without clear goals or definitions and in whatever manner it considers convenient on any given day.<sup>62</sup> For instance, the decision to lock-up roughly 16.7 million acres under roadless restrictions in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska has been highlighted as an advancement for 30x30. Likewise, the misguided 225,000-acre mineral withdrawal in the Superior National Forest in Minnesota was touted as a win for the so-called “America the Beautiful Initiative.” These measures continually threaten working lands, private landowners, and multiple uses of land.

*Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA)*—Since the passage of the GAOA in 2020, the USFS received up to \$285 million from the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) each year to address the deferred maintenance backlog.<sup>63</sup> Despite this significant investment, the USFS’s deferred maintenance backlog increased from \$5.22 billion in FY 2019 to over \$7.66 billion in FY 2022.<sup>64</sup> While this increase is not as large as those experienced by agencies like the National Park Service, it still represents an astonishing 47 percent increase over a relatively short period. The FY 2025 budget requests \$285 million for 89 LRF

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, “Analysis of Threats to Mature and Old-Growth Forests on Lands Managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management,” January 2024, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/MOG-Threats-Intro.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/MOG-Threats-Intro.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System,” December 20, 2023, 88 FR 88042, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/12/20/2023-27875/land-management-plan-direction-for-old-growth-forest-conditions-across-the-national-forest-system>.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Forest Service, “National Old-Growth Amendment,” <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/old-growth-forests/amendment#:~:text=The%20National%20Old%20Growth%20Amendment,to%20rapidly%20changing%20climate%20conditions>.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification,” <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, et al., “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful,” 2021, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas, launched April 19, 2024, <https://www.conservation.gov/pages/atlas-and-data>.

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “FAQs-Great American Outdoors Act,” <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/gaoa/faqs>.

<sup>64</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2013-FY2022 Estimates and Issues” Carol Hardy Vincent, August 8, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43997>.

projects. Of this amount, \$33.86 million is for administrative and contingency funds, which will do nothing to reduce the maintenance backlog.<sup>65</sup>

The FY 2025 budget request also includes \$218 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which covers \$123.8 million for land acquisition and \$94.2 million for the Forest Legacy Program.<sup>66</sup> Last year, the USFS acquired over 46,000 acres of land.<sup>67</sup> Despite this permanent and mandatory funding stream, the discretionary USFS budget continues to carry a specific line item for land acquisition above LWCF funding. Adding new acres to the federal estate for the USFS to manage while the agency's deferred maintenance backlog steadily rises will only exacerbate existing maintenance challenges.

*Biden Border Crisis*—The Biden Border Crisis is harming USFS lands, primarily through the illegal cultivation of narcotics on USFS lands by drug cartels. The USFS reported that 5,801 illegal cannabis cultivation sites were detected on NFS lands during the 2011–2022 period.<sup>68</sup> While data is limited, the USFS estimated that it had removed 381,510 pounds of trash, 479 miles of plastic irrigation lines, and 228 containers of banned and illegal pesticides from these illegal cultivation sites over a roughly 20-year period.<sup>69</sup> This illegal cultivation also sparked wildfires that burned over 265,000 acres.<sup>70</sup> The USFS estimated that illegal marijuana cultivation on National Forest System lands earns cartels an estimated \$56 million to \$91 million annually.<sup>71</sup> Even the USFS's own budget documents acknowledge that the agency has historically been “underestimating the threat of this activity on Federal public lands” and only capturing a mere fraction of the illicit activity occurring on NFS lands.<sup>72</sup> For example, the USFS used new technology to survey a mere four percent of three National Forests and found 136 cultivation sites.<sup>73</sup> Of these sites, 77 had gone completely undetected over the previous 20 years.<sup>74</sup> Despite the promise of this new technology, the budget does not specifically ask for any related increases to address President Biden's border crisis. In fact, the only increases related to border enforcement are for updated vehicles. With each officer of the USFS's Law Enforcement and Investigations program patrolling, on average, a sprawling 370,000 acres of NFS lands,<sup>75</sup> investments in enforcement technology and personnel are sorely needed.

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<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> *Id.*

<sup>68</sup> Response to questions for the record submitted by Chairman Westerman. On file with the Committee.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, “Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Justification”, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs-fy25-congressional-budget-justification.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.* Pg. 29a-109.

<sup>74</sup> *Id.* Pg. 29a-109.

<sup>75</sup> *Id.* Pg. 29a-108.



**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON EXAMINING THE  
PRESIDENT'S FY 2025 BUDGET REQUEST  
FOR THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE**

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**Tuesday, June 4, 2024  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, DC**

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The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m. in Room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom Tiffany [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Tiffany, McClintock, Fulcher, Stauber, Curtis, Bentz, Westerman; Kamlager-Dove, and Leger Fernández. Also present: Representatives LaMalfa; and Stansbury.

Mr. TIFFANY. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will come to order.

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

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to participate in today's hearing from the dais: the gentleman from California, Mr. LaMalfa.

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.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM TIFFANY, A REPRESENTATIVE  
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WISCONSIN**

Mr. TIFFANY. I would like to begin by welcoming Chief Moore back before the Subcommittee. Chief Moore, it is good to have you here again. We appreciate you taking the time to answer our questions on your agency's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request.

Improving the health of our nation's forests and combating the devastating wildfire crisis are some of the most pressing issues before this Committee. The scale of this challenge is immense and cannot be overstated. For far too long communities, particularly those out West, have had to bear the brunt of catastrophic wildfire for years with seemingly no end in sight. Unfortunately, the Forest Service's Fiscal Year 2025 budget fails to rise to meet this challenge.

Due to reckless Democratic spending during the previous Congress, the Forest Service received roughly \$11.5 billion in supplemental funding. This funding was touted as transformative and the only tool the agency needed to increase the pace and scale of forest management. Years later, it is hard to see any difference this funding has made on the ground.

For the second year in a row, the Forest Service budget proposes treating fewer acres than the year before, with a target of 4 million acres treated. Based on the agency's own estimates, this puts the Forest Service roughly 2 million acres behind the goals they laid out in the 10-year wildlife crisis strategy.

As we know from previous investigative reporting and Committee oversight, these numbers are still likely inflated due to Forest Service's policies of counting acres treated more than once. I am happy that my bipartisan ACRES Act passed the House last year, and I hope the Senate can consider this legislation quickly. However, I am still disappointed that this issue even requires legislation to fix.

Chief Moore, the American people deserve transparency and accountability, and I would strongly encourage your agency to improve the quality of this data.

Concerningly, the number of acres treated is not the only Forest Service target that is being missed. Last year, the Forest Service also fell short of its timber harvest targets by roughly 260 million acres. And once again, this budget has lowered the timber targets from 3.4 billion board feet to 3.2 billion board feet for the next 2 years.

[Chart.]

Mr. TIFFANY. Throughout this Congress I have often shown the chart behind me, which demonstrates the relationship between failing to harvest timber and catastrophic wildfires. There is a direct relationship between our continuing failure to harvest timber and the historically catastrophic wildfire years we are experiencing. It is therefore deeply troubling that, instead of attempting to remedy the shortcomings of failing to meet the agency's target this year, the Forest Service has apparently chosen to lower its timber target by 400 million board feet.

This is not walking down the right path to forest restoration. We have heard from our land managers, including Chief Moore, about the need for a paradigm shift in the way we manage our forests. I agree. But it continues to be abundantly clear that funding alone will not deliver this shift, and we must address the regulatory and litigation obstacles that continue to impede management efforts.

This budget once again seeks more funding to do less management, while also failing to offer any reforms to address long-standing barriers to forest management. I am rightfully skeptical.

While I have concerns with this proposed budget, I do recognize the enormous challenges facing the Forest Service, and hope that we can discuss ways to bring about the changes to see better results. There is broad agreement on the need to turn the tide against this wildfire crisis and restore health and resiliency to our ailing forests.

We also know that we need to aggressively suppress wildfires threatening our communities, take care of our brave wildland



firefighters in a fiscally responsible manner, and support our local forest products industry.

I want to once again thank Chief Randy Moore for being here today.

We are committed to working with you and your agency on these solutions, and we look forward to hearing more from you today.

With that, I now yield back and recognize Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. SYDNEY KAMLAGER-DOVE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Chair Tiffany and Chief Moore.

You are back before us again in the Federal Lands Subcommittee, and I look forward to the conversation today. Your time is valuable. We know this. And as we enter this year's fire season, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude for the work that you and your agency do each and every day, especially for Californians and Angelenos.

The Forest Service is charged with sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. That is no small task, as the nation's forests and grasslands make up 193 million acres nationwide. And last month was the hottest May on record and the 12th consecutive month to claim that title. Let me repeat that: 12 straight months of record highs. A full calendar of record busting temperatures, and not just in the House Oversight Committee. This is unprecedented, and should be indisputable affirmation that climate change is affecting our public lands.

Such drastic climate changes make the work of the Forest Service ever more complex and essential as fire seasons rage longer, drought intensifies, and our forests face considerable resiliency obstacles. So, it would make sense to me that we would be aiming to meet the Forest Service's budget requests, fully fund their vital mitigation and response accounts, amplify the innovative work being done to modernize forest products, and ensure that the agency has significant support for staffing and capacity challenges. After all, that is how you help government work.

Unfortunately, we have continued to see a cycle of chronic and unsustainable underfunding for the agency, underfunding and then blame gaming. In fact, just a few months ago the Chief warned us that lower appropriated funds, required cost-of-living adjustments, and inflated costs of operation are leading to funding gaps in salaries and other internal services among the Forest Service. We must listen to our agency leaders when they express such significant concerns.

Democrats delivered with monumental investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which have certainly helped. I know that the firefighter pay increase from the infrastructure law has been an important hiring and retention tool for the Forest Service, and I am pleased to see \$216 million in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to continue this initiative, one which we must make permanent.

Despite the gains from these investments, the Forest Service still faces vacancies in fire-related positions and general staffing gaps in non-fire positions. Such gaps directly tie to project delays and management challenges across the agency that my Republican counterparts often attribute to the legal burdens of environmental review.

However, we know that reviewing, permitting, and project management activities require staff capacity more than anything to execute the tools we have already granted the Forest Service, tools such as the 12 new authorities Congress has passed in the last 10 years meant to reduce the permitting process or the role of judicial review in the project approval proposal.

The Forest Service doesn't need new authority or additional waivers of our bedrock environmental laws. It needs sustainable funding and additional staff capacity. It is promising to see a prioritization from the Biden administration to address staffing challenges across the agency to support a growing demand for outdoor recreation, restoration projects aimed at adapting to a changing climate, protection of cultural resources, and providing clean water resources nationwide.

Chief Moore, I look forward to hearing from you and listening to our discussion today. I hope that my colleagues and I can work together to support a beneficial and strong Forest Service budget for Fiscal Year 2025.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Representative Kamlager-Dove. Now, I am going to recognize the Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, if he is ready for his opening statement.

Sir, are you prepared?

Mr. WESTERMAN. Always prepared, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter.]

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief Moore, thank you for being here today. It has been good to work with you and visit with you and to understand the challenges that forestry and America face, and I know you are on the front lines of that. It is something I am very passionate about. But as we look at the budget request from this year and we see the increase, I think you can understand why we have some heartburn when you look at the history of the funding that we have sent to the Forest Service.

When I first came to Congress, the big issue was fire funding. And we did the fire funding fix. And then we did the Great American Outdoors Act, and included the Forest Service in the Great American Outdoors Act. There was the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 that gave more money to the Forest Service. I did not vote for that one. I did not vote for the Inflation Reduction Act. But all of those bills put more funding into the Forest Service. And it doesn't appear that anything is getting better with the health of our forests across the country.

And I know you face a lot of challenges, and a lot of that is because of Congress, and because we have failed to give you the tools and the authorities to be able to go in and do the work that you need to do. And we are in a situation now that you and I have discussed, where it is kind of a triage mode. There are a limited number of resources, there are a limited number of people who can do management. And the areas that seem most critical to protect are those wildland-urban interfaces, their transportation corridors, transmission corridors, watersheds.

And it is almost like, I will use the term "the troops," that are out there to manage the forests are retreating back to these areas and trying to create the last defense against catastrophic wildfire, and this is something that has come about because of years of not being able to manage the rest of the forests. And we know that to be able to manage forests, we have to have markets for the products.

Mr. McClintock has had success in passing legislation that has been very beneficial down around South Lake Tahoe in doing management that has stopped wildfire, yet there are hardly any markets for those products that come off, and it ends up costing the taxpayer a thousand to a couple thousand dollars an acre to be able to go in and manage the forests simply because the mill infrastructure is not there that was once available. And we have seen that in many places in the West.

And being from Arkansas, where we have a vibrant forest products economy, and I know you are from Louisiana, where they have the same, my constituents probably don't understand, nor should they have to understand why we have to spend Federal dollars to be able to do management on the forests. That is a foreign concept because, usually, when you do management on the forests, it generates revenue to not only pay for itself but to go back into the landowners' pockets, which in this case is the Treasury and the taxpayer.

And there was one time in the history of this country where the Forest Service actually put more money back into the Treasury than it cost to run the Forest Service. We are not anywhere remotely even close to that anymore, and we are seeing the levels of fire danger increase. We are seeing the amount of land that is subject to catastrophic wildfire increase. We are seeing more mills close, and the train is going in the wrong direction.

I know that you know this, I know this, and we ought to be able to work together to figure out how to turn the train around and make America's forests all that they should be. I look forward to hearing your testimony and to having a dialogue about how we can work together to use the resources that we have to create a better situation for America's forests, which means creating a better situation for America's wildlife, for America's air quality, for America's water quality, and all the other benefits that go with a healthy forest.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Chairman Westerman. We will now move on to witness testimony.

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

To begin your testimony, please press the “on” button on the microphone. We use timing lights. When you begin, the light will turn green. At the end of 5 minutes, the light will turn red.

I would like to introduce Mr. Randy Moore, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

Chief Moore, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF RANDY MOORE, CHIEF, U.S. FOREST SERVICE,  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, and the members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. We are grateful for your continued support.

The President’s budget names three primary goals for us: to modernize wildland fire management, to sustain investments critical to our mission, and to ensure equitable access and benefits to Americans. Today, I will share our progress as we put money to work to confront serious challenges. I will share how our work will continue to be a sound investment.

We directly steward about 193 million acres of National Forest System lands. We reach across boundaries to assist states, tribes, communities, and private landowners to keep millions more acres of healthy forests productive. Every American benefits from these forests, directly or indirectly. Together these lands provide basic needs for life, clean air and water, while they contribute to energy production and support local economies. National forests alone contribute more than 410,000 jobs and \$44.3 billion to the gross domestic product.

To sustain productivity and health, forests must be able to withstand threats posed by wildfire, climate change, drought, insects, and disease, and on and on. We invested resources to act and ensure that they do just that. Foremost, we prioritize work to reduce wildfire risk, safeguard communities, and create resilient forests.

In 2022, we launched a 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy and we moved to implement it. Annual appropriations, coupled with the historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, provided an extraordinary opportunity to take bold and strategic actions. We did just that. We progressed to deliver on a promise to increase the pace and scale of our treatments. We are not just treating any acre, we are treating the right acres in the right places and at the right scale. We focused initial efforts on 21 priority landscapes within Western fireheds at the highest risk. They account for roughly 80 percent of wildfire risk.

These investments are paying dividends. Experts reported roughly \$700 billion worth of housing and infrastructure are at risk within these priority landscapes. This includes \$6.5 billion of municipal watersheds which supply drinking water to 12 million people. In the last 2 years, we reduced the average wildfire risk to these assets by 8 percent for infrastructure, 8 percent for housing,

and 12 percent for watersheds. That means that we protected more than \$300 million worth of homes at risk.

In the Stanislaus National Forest, for example, 17 communities are at lower risk, including towns of Cold Springs and Strawberry. A million socially vulnerable people are at less risk. Nearly half of national forest lands and priority landscapes are now considered unlikely to burn at high intensity. We must remain on course and build on these gains.

We recognize the urgency of investing in a permanent and a comprehensive pay increase to provide a more livable wage, enhance recruitment, and stabilize retention. We must also improve housing conditions and provide better care for our firefighters' physical and mental health. We look forward to seeing an end to reports of firefighters living in cars with few benefits and limited mental health care.

In addition to work to address the wildfire crisis and firefighters, we continue to take action that supports access and benefits from forests. Visitor use, hunting and fishing, energy and minerals development, forest products, and livestock grazing generate 69 percent of the contributions to the economy.

Thanks to the Great American Outdoors Act funds, we relieved some of the pressures from the \$8.6 billion of backlog that we have. The budget requests \$58 million to maintain critical recreation services, with a focus on offering welcoming and equitable opportunities.

We are also making a difference in our urban environments. The Forest Service and partners are planting and maintaining trees in cities and areas where 84 percent of Americans live. Trees combat extreme heat and climate change, and they also improve access to nature.

The 2025 budget returns basic funding to most programs. This includes forest products, which are vital to sustaining rural communities. This includes sustainable timber supply. We know it is a critical component and is part of a complex, market-driven system. And while we don't control markets, we can support industry through forest products and wood innovations which help mills adapt and modernize. And while the current industry adapts, the agency has taken strides to support the existing industry by investing nearly \$80 million over the last 3 years in directly supporting sawmills and other forest products manufacturing facilities.

We have also expanded the wood basket for mills through the build and timber transport program, and authorized extensions to timber sale contracts to provide relief from the decline in the demand for paper products.

In closing, we are fully committed to meeting the challenges before us with the resources Congress provided. The people of America deserve nothing less than to see their money put to work to benefit all. Thank you, and I welcome your comments.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Moore follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF RANDY MOORE, CHIEF, USDA FOREST SERVICE

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's fiscal year (FY) 2025 Budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service.

The fiscal year 2025 President's Budget for the USDA Forest Service discretionary appropriations totals \$6.5 billion for base programs and \$2.4 billion for the wildfire suppression cap adjustment (through the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund). The fiscal year 2025 Budget focuses on three primary areas: modernizing the wildland fire management workforce; sustaining the foundational investments critical to the mission of the Forest Service; and ensuring equitable access to and benefits from the National Forest System.

America's forests provide timber, clean air and water, forage, and energy production. They support local economies through employment, trade, recreation, tourism, green jobs, and livestock grazing. They host and protect sites and landscapes of high cultural, spiritual, or recreational value. These benefits are at risk from wildfires, pests, diseases, invasive species, and drought, all of which are exacerbated by climate change. It is vital to continue to act now to mitigate these threats and protect our resources. Alongside our partners, the Forest Service will continue to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires to communities in FY 2025 through investments in the wildland fire management workforce and throughout the high-priority landscapes identified within the agency's 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The investments highlighted below reflect services the Forest Service delivers through work on National Forests, partnerships with State, Private, and Tribal landowners, and our Research and Development mission area. These investments enable the Forest Service to restore long-term forest health and resiliency across landscapes the American people rely on while ensuring equitable access to the resources on National Forest System lands.

Recent analysis shows that in FY 2022, Forest Service programs and work contributed approximately 410,400 jobs (average of annual full-time, part-time, temporary, and seasonal) and \$44.3 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Recreational visitor use, hunting and fishing, energy and minerals development, forest products, and livestock grazing generated 69 percent of the economic activity. The Forest Service continues to be a good place to invest and will maximize every dollar invested into our agency, making every dollar work for the American people. The citizens we serve deserve nothing less than to see the value of their money at work for their benefit.

#### The President's FY 2025 Budget Request for Specific Priorities

The following investments align with and enhance the agency's efforts to modernize and invest in our wildland fire management workforce:

- The 2025 Budget proposes \$2.6 billion for base Wildland Fire Management activities, investing in firefighter compensation, benefits, mental health, and wellbeing, and supporting the objectives of the agency's 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
  - o Provides **\$216 million to implement a permanent, comprehensive pay increase** for the wildland firefighter workforce, providing a more equitable wage, enhancing recruitment, and stabilizing retention.
  - o **\$136 million for additional federal firefighting capacity** (570 more permanent firefighters and continued transition to a more full-time workforce) to enable the Forest Service to more effectively meet the demands of the increasingly year-round wildfire season, while improving the work-life balance of firefighters and support personnel.
  - o **\$10 million for mental health and well-being assistance** to ensure our wildfire firefighter workforce are supported in managing the mental and physical aspects of their mission.
- In addition, the Budget proposes **\$25 million to address the urgent need for suitable employee housing** through necessary maintenance and repairs of Forest Service housing units.

The 2025 Budget proposes to fund the National Forest System at \$2 billion, prioritizing recreation service delivery, climate smart land management, forest products, law enforcement, and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, while maintaining foundational hazardous fuels treatments to reduce wildfire risk:

- **\$207 million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction:** to return to previously enacted program levels and mitigate wildfire risk on 4.0 million acres with a focus on high-priority and high-risk fire sheds, building on hazardous fuels funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, and in aligning with the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
- **\$58 million for Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness:** to provide critical recreation operations, planning, services, and improvements, with particular emphasis on creating welcoming, sustainable, and equitable recreation opportunities for all Americans with a focus toward underserved and Tribal communities.
- **\$41 million for Forest Products:** to support the foundational funding needed to maintain the Forest Service's ability to sell timber, which can be a critical component to sustaining local rural communities.
- **\$33 million for Vegetation and Watershed Management:** to provide support for healthy and resilient watersheds and landscapes, sustain the production of clean and abundant air and water, assist with meeting the Administration's climate goals, and contribute to healthy and productive communities and Tribal Nations.
- **\$34 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program:** to invest in communities and regions with a collaborative, common purpose in reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health and resiliency.
- **\$21 million for Law Enforcement Operations:** to provide critical law enforcement response for the prevention, detection, and criminal investigation of violations of Federal laws and regulations for the protection of visitors to National Forest System lands, Forest Service employees, and natural and cultural resources.
- **\$1.5 billion for National Forest System Salaries and Expenses:** to maintain the workforce needed to support the agency programs critical for forest health and resiliency, which complement the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

Further investments ensure that the Forest Service relies on the latest science and technology to deliver results on the ground and for the people:

- **\$470 million for Information Technology Capabilities:** continue modernization of our Information Technology systems that allow the public to better access our services, sustain emergency communication systems, and provide our workforce the tools they need to carry out our conservation mission.
- **\$316 million for Forest and Rangeland Research:** continue investments in research priorities, with a focus on climate change-related research including reforestation, carbon accounting, and fire and fuels research.

These investments continue to build on the historic investments provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) (P.L. 117-58) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (P.L. 117-169). The Forest Service will continue to strengthen our long-standing work and relationships with States, Tribes, local communities, private landowners, and other stakeholders to adapt lessons learned into a coordinated and effective program of work to improve the resiliency of landscapes and watersheds, reduce wildfire risk, protect and maintain infrastructure, support outdoor recreation, establish tree canopy in nature-deprived communities, and invest in the reforestation of America's impacted landscapes.

The Forest Service cannot succeed in this work alone, especially when addressing the fire sheds highest at risk, which are typically in multiple ownerships. Through meaningful communication, expanded partnerships, and broader community support, the Forest Service will increase the use of prescribed fire and other fuel treatments and the management of unplanned ignitions to reduce long-term wildfire risks. Fortunately, we have decades of experience working through partnerships and collaboration based on common values and shared goals across shared landscapes as set out over 20 years ago in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

### **Ensuring Equitable Access to and Benefits from the National Forest System**

The Forest Service remains unwavering in its commitment to the values of equity, inclusion, and equal opportunities for its employees and the public it serves. The Forest Service maintains the intent to focus on prioritizing activities that will provide benefits to disadvantaged or underserved communities. The Forest Service vows to proactively engage in actions that ensure a safe, resilient, and harassment-free work culture where employees are treated with respect and dignity.

The Forest Service will continue to invest in actions that facilitate access to the vital resources our forests and grasslands provide. This effort is twofold. First, we must ensure that those who rely on these services and benefits can access those benefits safely. Therefore, we are committed to improving the operation and maintenance of our extensive infrastructure portfolio that includes buildings, dams, communication sites, recreation sites, roads, trails, and bridges. Second, to carry out this work effectively, the Forest Service is committed to continued intentional internal and external engagement with Tribal Nations and communities that live by, visit, and depend on national forests. The Forest Service is committed to identifying and removing barriers to access Forest Service programs and services for historically underserved communities. This will be done by integrating equity-centered criteria in the design, funding, and prioritization of all policies, programs, and activities to center equity considerations as part of the decision process. The Forest Service will also work to remove barriers and boost economic opportunities through improved access to contracts, grants and agreements, and permits.

### **Leveraging Additional Funding Authorities**

It is expected that by FY 2025, much of the funding from the IRA will have been invested, but along with the tools and investments proposed in the FY2025 Presidents Budget, the Forest Service will continue to leverage funding within the BIL to combat climate change and confront the wildfire crisis, create new markets and technology for wood products, and restore forest health and resiliency through partnerships and collaboration across landscapes.

The BIL provided \$1.4 billion for hazardous fuels treatments, while the Inflation Reduction Act provided an additional \$1.8 billion for hazardous fuels work within the wildland urban interface. In February, we announced \$500 million for FY 2024 to expand work on the Forest Service's strategy to reduce the risk to communities, critical infrastructure and forests from the nation's growing wildfire crisis. From 2022–2024, we have invested a combined \$1.6 billion in the 21 high-priority landscapes identified under the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy as we continue moving these landscapes toward a maintenance state. These investments will help reduce the risk of wildfire to communities, Tribal lands, ecosystems, and critical infrastructure, including utility corridors and public water sources. Our work under the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy provides many values the public depends on and cares about including beginning to reduce risk to approximately 550 communities, of which 475 are underserved; 2,500 miles of power lines; and 1,800 municipal watersheds.

Through Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) (P.L. 116-152) funding, the Forest Service continues to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities in the national forests and grasslands through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (GAOA-LRF). In both FY 2024 and 2025, increased emphasis was given to using GAOA-LRF funding to address deferred maintenance on Forest Service-owned housing units as one step toward helping our employees confront the housing availability and affordability crisis in this country. In addition to the \$40 million Congress approved in FY 2024, we are proposing another \$30 million in housing-related GAOA-LRF projects to address this critical need. It is estimated that in FY 2025, GAOA-LRF projects at FS will contribute 3,200 jobs and \$360 million in GDP.

In closing, the President's FY 2025 Budget request for the Forest Service proposes a landmark investment that reflects the Administration's ongoing commitment to building and sustaining a robust and resilient Federal wildland fire management workforce, maintains funding priorities for risk-based wildfire reduction, and improves overall access to and utilization of our National Forests System. The FY 2025 Budget request also highlights the importance of restoring and creating resilient landscapes, improving infrastructure, and removing barriers to access. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to fulfill the President's goals and our key responsibilities for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands, and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.



QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO THE HONORABLE RANDY MOORE, CHIEF,  
U.S. FOREST SERVICE

**The Honorable Randy Moore did not submit responses to the Committee by the appropriate deadline for inclusion in the printed record.**

**Questions Submitted by Representative Westerman**

*Question 1. During the hearing, Representative Stauber asked about a “temporary” cap on backcountry permits in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. In response, you said: “So we are currently working with the local community to do just what you described. To date we have not made a lot of progress, but I would be willing to get back with you by the week’s end to give you more specifics on what we have been able to do within the community.”*

*1a) Did you get back with Representative Stauber by week’s end?*

*1b) If not, why not?*

*1c) Will you commit to lifting the “temporary” cap on backcountry permits in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area?*

*1d) What progress has the Forest Service made in reopening our national forests and ensuring we return to pre-pandemic levels of access?*

*Question 2. This committee has deep concerns with the Biden administration’s disproportionate focus on protecting so-called “old-growth” and “mature” forests, not least because it diverts agency efforts from addressing the wildfire crisis and because such terms are poorly defined. Yet the Forest Service recently published a Notice of Intent to amend all 128 national forest land management plans to provide direction on how to manage, conserve, and steward “old-growth” forest conditions.*

*2a) In general, how long have forest plan revisions taken to complete in the last 5 years?*

*2b) How long is the process of amending all 128 forest plans expected to take?*

*2c) Please provide an estimate of the total hours that the Forest Service’s staff has already spent and plans to continue spending on this “old-growth” amendment process.*

*2d) Absent this focus on “old-growth,” would Forest Service staff have more time to spend working on wildfire risk-reduction and NEPA-compliant forest management projects?*

*Question 3. In January 2024, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released an introductory report that identified wildfire, insects, and diseases as the leading threats to “mature and old-growth” forests and even admitted that “tree cutting” is a minor threat that generally “improved or maintained” the stands that had been managed. Given these findings, should the Forest Service instead focus on expanding its forest treatment efforts?*

*Question 4. The 2012 Planning Rule consciously chose to leave old growth issues to the individual plan development process, rather than promulgating national standards or guidelines for old growth.*

*4a) What changed between the adoption of the 2012 Planning Rule and April of 2021 when President Biden signed the Executive Order on Old Growth that made a single national approach the correct one?*

*4b) You were regional forester in Region 9 when this took place. Do you believe the Forest plans adopted in Region 9 when you were regional forester were adequately or inadequately protective of old growth?*

*4c) Can you provide the committee with information regarding whether old growth has increased or decreased in the region since 2009 when the forest plans were last revised?*

*Question 5. You mentioned that there is a large amount of timber under contract that has not yet been cut. Can you please provide the committee with the following information:*

*5a) The volume under contract for as many previous fiscal years as possible, but at least the last 10 years.*

5b) *The type of timber under contract—sawtimber, pulpwood, biomass, other convertible, etc.*

5c) *The volume of timber under contract but either under injunction or withdrawn due to litigation, by Forest Service region.*

*Question 6. Can you provide the committee with a breakdown of the amount of volume under litigation by Forest Service Region?*

*Question 7. Chief Moore, during the hearing, there were several discrepancies regarding the amount of timber sold by the Forest Service in recent years. Please provide the amount sold annually, in billion board feet (BBF), by the Forest Service for the past 10 fiscal years.*

*Question 8. Does the Forest Service count personal use firewood as a timber accomplishment? If yes, has this always been the case?*

*Question 9. How much has personal use firewood contributed to timber outputs during the past four years?*

*Question 10. How many fuel breaks have been established under the categorical exclusion that was created by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act?*

*10a) Where are these fuel breaks located?*

*10b) How many total acres do they cover?*

*10c) Did the Forest Service use commercial timber harvest to establish any of these fuel breaks? If so, please identify them.*

*Question 11. The committee has learned that of roughly 55 wood product facility closures in the last several years, 21 of them were in close proximity to the National Forest System.*

*11a) Do you believe that the Forest Service should be striving to keep these facilities operating, so that they can help provide a market for wood products on the National Forest System?*

*11b) If so, what is the agency doing to prevent future closures of wood products facilities?*

*Question 12. Across the country, timber mills are shutting down or significantly curtailing operations due to a lack of reliable timber supply. Congress has tried to assist by giving your agency tools like 20-year stewardship contracting authority, but the Forest Service has failed to fully utilize that tool. Given that your agency is planning to reduce timber harvesting levels, what concrete steps can the Forest Service take to sustain and expand forest products infrastructure?*

*Question 13. During questioning from Representative Pete Stauber, you said that the Forest Service would have met its Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 timber-harvesting goal “but for litigation.”*

*13a) Please provide a list of all litigation that prevented the Forest Service from reaching this target.*

*13b) Please provide an estimate of the amount of timber, in BBF, that each lawsuit or settlement cited above prevented from being harvested in FY 2023.*

*Question 14. The Forest Service has lowered its timber-harvesting goal from 3.4 BBF in FY 2023 to 3.2 BBF for both FY 2024 and FY 2025.*

*14a) Is the Forest Service currently on track to meet this reduced goal for FY 2024? If not, why not?*

*14b) Did the Forest Service lower these goals at least partially as a response to ongoing or anticipated litigation?*

*14c) If so, please provide a list of all litigation that influenced this determination.*

*Question 15. The partial fix to the Cottonwood decision expired in March 2023. Please describe the effects that the Cottonwood decision, and litigation generally, continue to have on the Forest Service’s ability to actively manage our nation’s forests.*

*Question 16. Road access is especially important in those U.S. Forest Service lands that are located near and along the U.S.-Mexico border. A few years ago, I toured the Coronado National Forest in Arizona with CBP officials who stated that the inability to build proper access roads diminished agent mobility and reduced the effectiveness of border enforcement measures. This, in turn, poses dangers to officer safety when they must engage in the pursuit or apprehension of suspected perpetrators.*

*16a) Will you commit to supporting the construction of more roads on Forest Service lands along the southern border to protect our law enforcement officers and increase operational control of the border?*

*16b) Have you had any discussions with Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas—or any top Homeland Security officials—about how to address these challenges?*

*Question 17. President Biden’s open-border policy has contributed to increased drug trafficking and cultivation on federal lands. The Forest Service recently detected more than 5,800 illegal cannabis cultivation sites within our national forests. Since illegal cultivation activities have sparked massive wildfires, their growing presence on national forest lands remains a serious concern. In fact, in this year’s budget request, the Forest Service admits that it has “likely underestimat[ed] the threat of [marijuana cultivation] activity on Federal public lands.”*

*17a) What concrete steps is the Forest Service taking to reduce illegal drug production in national forests?*

*17b) This year’s budget request explains that when the Forest Service recently used new technology to survey a mere 4 percent of only 3 national forests, it found 77 illegal drug cartel cultivation sites that had gone undetected for 20 years. Given that this alarming figure pertains to just a fraction of our national forests, does the Forest Service plan to expand this kind of surveillance?*

*Question 18. The Forest Service budget requested decreased funding for the Joint Fire Science Program, which funds scientific studies on managing wildland fires. Why is this program being cut, while other budget items that are wholly unrelated to forest health are receiving increases?*

*Question 19. How many miles of road has the Forest Service decommissioned per year from FY 2004 to FY 2024? Please break down the annual figures by state, region, or both.*

*Question 20. How many miles of road will the Forest Service decommission pursuant to the FY 2025 budget? Please break down this figure by state, region, or both.*

*Question 21. In response to Chairman Tiffany’s question, “What is a green job?” you replied that a green job is a job that involves “working with the environment to keep it healthy and resilient.”*

*21a) Earlier in the hearing, you stated that timber harvesting is “necessary” for effective forest management and reducing wildfire risk. By this logic, should timber-harvesting jobs qualify as “green jobs”?*

*21b) If not, why not?*

*Question 22. The Forest Service has reduced its forest treatment goal for this year to just 4 million acres, which—by the agency’s own estimates—is inadequate for confronting the nation’s current wildfire risk. I’m concerned that the Forest Service is now shifting the goalposts to “outcome-based” metrics when, just a few short years ago, your agency—not Congress—set acreage-based targets. The Forest Service has also received \$11.5 billion in taxpayer funding to achieve this goal of treating 20 million acres in 10 years.*

*22a) How are we supposed to hold the agency accountable if we’re not measuring progress based on acres treated?*

*22b) How is this change in metrics consistent with the 10-year Wildfire Strategy?*

*Question 23. Wildfires do not respect administrative boundaries, which is why collaboration with states, Tribes, and other stakeholders is crucial for fire prevention. Within the Forest Service, the State, Private and Tribal Forestry organization is tasked with facilitating much of this needed cross-boundary work. The FY 2025 budget, however, decreases funding for that account by roughly \$32 million.*

*The Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's most recent report found that federal agencies must do more to engage tribes in meaningful co-management agreements. So, why is this funding being reduced?*

*Question 24. President Biden's 30x30 Initiative is often described as a campaign to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. Critically, however, the administration has failed to make clear what counts as conservation. For example, on the newly created conservation.gov, the administration lists most National Forest System land as not contributing, or only pending additions, to the national conservation goals.*

*24a) Does the Forest Service share the view, apparently held by the Biden administration, that most of the National Forest System lands are insufficiently conserved?*

*i) If so, please explain why.*

*ii) If not, please explain why not.*

*Question 25. There is broad international and domestic consensus about the carbon benefits of using more wood products in construction. In fact, at the December 2023 COP 28 summit in Dubai, the U.S. and 16 other countries agreed to increase sustainable forestry and the use of wood products in construction as "a vital decarbonization strategy." However, the U.S. currently imports about one third of its lumber. The Forest Service manages about 188 million acres of national forests, including some of the most productive forests in the world, but provides very little of our demand for lumber and other wood products.*

*Do you believe that the Forest Service has a responsibility to sustainably manage a portion of its lands in a manner that meets some of our need for carbon friendly wood products?*

*Question 26. The Forest Service provides several important reports for tracking the agency's timber sale program and harvest trends, including the "Forest Products Cut and Sold report," "Periodic Timber Sale Accomplishment Reports," and "Harvest Trends on National Forest System Lands." The most recent data available in the "Harvest Trends on National Forest System Lands" report is from 2021.*

*Please provide an updated version of this report and make this updated report available to the public on the Forest Service website.*

#### **Questions Submitted by Representative Fulcher**

*Just recently the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) forecasted a very high risk for wildfires in the West this year. Low precipitation combined with a high fuel mix creates a challenging problem for rural communities and the electric utilities that serve them. Electric cooperatives in my state are doing everything within their power to mitigate wildfire risk but extreme weather conditions remain an uncertainty and are ultimately hard to plan for because of the unknowns. These utilities are not for profit and all additional costs are borne by their customers.*

*Unfortunately, I understand the USFS is looking to charge utilities with power line corridors through their lands nearly \$3 million per fire incident for strict liability damages. Smaller, rural electric cooperatives and the communities they serve cannot bear this level of damages. Already these utilities are finding it difficult to obtain wildfire insurance. This level of damage would bankrupt these utilities. I'm curious about your authority to unilaterally increase strict liability damages for powerline corridors.*

*Question 1. Could you confirm that this is accurate, and if so, will you work with my office to collaborate with utilities on this matter?*

*Question 2. Under what authority can the USFS charge strict liability damages and how does the agency justify this one-size-fits all level of damages?*

#### **Questions Submitted by Representative Stauber**

*Question 1. Please provide an estimate of the number of acres of National Forests within the state of Minnesota would be covered by the old growth plan amendment, and specifically the number of acres that are needed to satisfy the requirements laid out in the Service's Notice of Intent (NOI) to provide for "connectivity, "recruitment," and "adjacency" in old growth management.*

*Question 2. As you state during the hearing, prescribed fires are only one of the many critical tools used to prevent catastrophic fire on our nation's public and private lands. Last May, the EPA finalized a new ambient air quantity standard for fine particulate matter, otherwise known as PM2.5 NAAQS.*

*2a) Can the Committee assume that the recent PM 2.5 NAAQS ruling will have zero impact on federal, state, and private land managers' ability to utilize controlled burns to safely manage our nation's forests?*

*2b) As states develop implementation plans to meet EPA's new standard, how will USDA and EPA work collaboratively to ensure that the states implementing the new standard do not remove this critical fire prevention tool?*

*2c) Further, because fire doesn't know boundaries between federal and private lands and since private lands represent approximately 70% of total working forest acres, how is USDA working to ensure that all forests retain this critical management tool?*

*2d) Is the agency concerned about the impact the PM 2.55 NAAQS ruling will have on the future success of wood products market development, and if so, how is the Agency working to ensure that rural economic health and public health can be achieved cooperatively?*

*Question 3. The inflation reduction act (IRA) directed the General Services Administration (GSA) to acquire and install materials that have substantially lower levels of embodied greenhouse gas emissions, as determined by the EPA. In response, EPA developed a low embodied pilot program and interim determination that prioritized concrete, glass, asphalt, and steel as qualifying for the allocated IRA funding. Products with lower embodied carbon, including bio-based materials, were segregated into a separate category for "further exploration," and tasked among others, USFS for developing guidance to support the purchase of bio-based materials, including wood products.*

*3a) Your agency continues to invest in wood products through programs like the Wood Innovation Grant Program and the Community Wood Facility Grant Program. What steps has USFS taken to develop guidance per EPA's request?*

*Question 4. One of the most effective ways to reduce embodied carbon in buildings is to build with wood products. Structural wood products do not require the same energy intensive manufacturing process that is common for other building materials. Additionally, wood products are unique in the fact that they store carbon—these materials are approximately 50% carbon by dry weight.*

*4a) Given this, why has this administration chosen to prioritize concrete, glass, asphalt, and steel?*

*4b) Given USFS's investment into wood products, has your agency made any effort to ensure that wood products included in administration policies which purport to lower carbon?*

*Question 5. On March 9, 2023, the Forest Service proposed changes to its cost recovery regulations pertaining to Land Uses; Special Uses; Strict Liability Limit and Insurance. The agency proposed dramatically raising cost recovery fees for special use permits in the first four categories of cost recovery, eliminating the current 50-hour exemption for outdoor recreation permits. The 50-hour exemption was first implemented in 2006 in the final cost recovery rule to lessen the impact on small entities. The proposed rule increases cost recovery fees starting at \$255 for less than 8 hours of work and up to \$3,313 for processing costs that require between 40 and 64 hours. The final rule has not been published in the Federal Register.*

*5a) Is the Forest Service still planning to totally eliminate the exemption for the first 50 hours of work?*

*5b) There are no refunds for categories 1 through 4 even if the agency does not respond or complete the work paid for under cost recovery. Are you planning to modify that portion of the rule to provide a refund if the agency fails to act?*

*5c) Is the pre-decisional objection process for project-level actions subject to cost recovery?*

*5d) When does the Forest Service expect to publish the final cost recovery rule?*

*Question 6. The Forest Service has been encouraged to look at the expansion of categorical exclusions (CATEX's) for routine special recreation permit re-issuance. The agency has made some progress in implementing CATEX's for ministerial permit*

*renewal. However, in designated wilderness, we are faced with hurdles outside the NEPA process, such as the Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) for activities that are prohibited in the wilderness but which may be necessary to fulfill the purposes of the Act. Some so-called "non-conforming" uses are authorized by Congress when a Wilderness is designated. An example would be the authorization for motorboat towing service in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.*

*6a) Does the MRA apply to these congressionally authorized uses?*

*6b) Are there additional categorical exclusions and streamlining actions the agency can take to improve the efficiency of issuing recreational special use permits?*

*Question 7. In the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, the Superior National Forest imposed a "temporary" cap on backcountry permits at 80% of the previous cap in response to increased use during the COVID-19 pandemic. When will this temporary cap be lifted?*

*Question 8. The Forest Service is revising SUDS, a web-based application used by Special Uses administrators to authorize permit leases and easements, amend these authorizations, and track billing information in the Recreation and Lands Programs. Program managers use the system to collect, analyze, maintain, and track data about special use permits and revenue, including data about land use and cost recovery.*

*8a) What is the status of that revision, how much does it cost, and when do you expect it to be launched?*

*8b) Are there any issues complicating SUDS implementation?*

*8c) Will these changes interrupt the processing of special use permit applications?*

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Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you, Chief Moore, for your testimony. We really appreciate that you are here today. And I will now recognize Members for 5 minutes.

We are going to take a couple rounds of questioning here before we break for votes. I recognize the gentleman from Minnesota for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chief Moore, thank you once again for coming before the Subcommittee.

Despite dramatic budget increases in Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023, we are seeing reduced access to outdoor recreation and diminished public benefits across the National Forest System. This has been evident in the Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota, for example.

In the Boundary Waters Canoe Area a "temporary cap on backcountry permits," equal to 80 percent of their previous cap, was put in place in response to increased demand and use during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time campsites in the BWCA were also closed, but many of those campsites still have not reopened today. Clearly, these caps are not temporary.

What progress has the Forest Service made in reopening our national forests and ensuring we return to pre-pandemic levels of access?

Mr. MOORE. Thank you for that question, Congressman.

We are currently working with the local community to do just what you described. To date, we have not made a lot of progress, but I would be willing to get back with you by the week's end to give you more specifics on what we have been able to do within the community.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you. The Service is largely reliant on a Ticketmaster-style online permit registration system involving a

mad dash to compete for a limited number of permits when they are released. Oftentimes, people buy up large blocks of permits that often go unused. And I recognize this isn't just an issue for the BWCA or the Superior National Forest or the Forest Service.

That said, what specifically is the Forest Service doing to address this?

Mr. MOORE. First of all, we want to be able to really understand what is going on. And we are trying to be responsive to what people are choosing to do by buying up blocks. So, we are looking into it to see what opportunities we have to limit what we see happening across that whole system. And to date, I don't have any news to report to you in terms of the progress that we have made on that.

Mr. STAUBER. Chief, are you looking to limit the big blocks of buying the permits for entry? Is that what you just said?

Mr. MOORE. We are going to be looking at all of it, including the big blocks.

Mr. STAUBER. OK. Well, let me ask you this. Would increasing the number of available permits and returning to pre-pandemic levels of access help alleviate this issue or make it worse?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I think it would, Congressman.

Mr. STAUBER. Changing gears a bit, would you consider timber harvesting to be an important tool for the Forest Service to protect against wildfire risk?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, timber is a necessary tool.

Mr. STAUBER. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Forest Service missed its timber harvesting target by approximately 260 million board feet. That includes missing the mark on forests like the Chippewa and Superior National Forests. You missed your 3.4 billion board feet goal by over 7.5 percent, almost 8 percent. How does missing this timber harvesting goal affect the forest system's wildfire risk?

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, one of the challenges we have is litigation. And if you look at the amount of litigation we have with our problems, we would have exceeded our timber targets. We have no control over that part of it. We just have to deal with it.

Our plan was to meet or exceed our targets. We would have done that, but for the litigation that we are currently under.

Mr. STAUBER. The weaponizing of the court system is what you are saying?

Mr. MOORE. I am saying that we would have met our targets, but for litigation.

Mr. STAUBER. The Service has lowered its timber harvesting goal from 3.4 billion board feet to 3.2 billion board feet for the next 2 years. If the Forest Service is aiming to harvest 200 million less board feet of timber over the next year, how do you plan to address this delta in terms of the wildfire risk?

Mr. MOORE. Well, actually, for the last 20 years, our timber harvesting has gone up. In fact, if I look at the last 20 years, we have increased our timber harvesting by roughly 30 percent. I am not really sure about the numbers that you are spouting, but I would be happy to meet with you separately to look at the numbers that you have, and where you got those numbers from, and compare to what we are showing in our books.

Mr. STAUBER. We got them from the professionals in the Forest Service.

And thanks in large part to the decreased availability of timber from Federal lands, mills across this country are closing, including several in my district, that have led to layoffs for hundreds of employees.

And given that many of our national forests are working industrial forests, does the Forest Service take into consideration lost economic activity when it makes decisions that limit responsible industrial use of our forests?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congressman. I mean, any time a mill closes, it hurts us, as well. And many of our employees have grown up and lived in those same communities.

Mr. STAUBER. I have 1 second left. I appreciate, Chief Moore, that you said in your comments that you are looking at national forests to produce energy and mineral development. The Superior National Forest is a working industrial forest where mining and timber harvesting are a desired condition. And we want to keep that just as it is. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, I just add to the gentleman from Minnesota we have talked to the Chief offline here. We want to see those numbers where they are saying that those harvest levels have actually gone up. We want to look at them in the long term as well as the short term. And we will be working with members of the Committee and with the Chief to compare those numbers and see where the differences lie.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. TIFFANY. I would now like to recognize the Ranking Member, Ms. Kamlager-Dove, for 5 minutes for her questioning.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Chief Moore, for your testimony. I just want to add that a Fiscal Year 2022 economic analysis found, actually, that the U.S. fire service programs contributed \$44.3 billion in gross domestic product and contributed 410,000 jobs. I think that is a very strong return on investment for the appropriations that you all have received.

Can you share how the Forest Service is addressing the most critical landscapes through the 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy and the funding provided from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I would be happy to.

The Wildfire Crisis Strategy involves and includes about 21 different landscapes across the West primarily. In those 21 landscapes, we have identified 550 communities within it, 2,500 miles of utility corridor lines. And we also have about 1,800 municipal or priority watersheds that serve as drinking water for 12 million people.

So, in that we are looking at the type of investment that we are making in those landscapes that are so important to the American people. And to date, just in the last 1½ to 2 years of implementation of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, we reduced the risk to homes by 8 percent. We reduced the risk to utility corridors and that critical infrastructure about another 8 percent. And then, on those



watersheds that are so important, we reduced the risk there about 12 percent.

And you may say, well, what does all of this mean? And what it really means in other terms is that we reduced the risk to about \$300 million worth of homes. And we have also reduced the risk to drinking water that serves 12 million people. This is only after the first 1½ years of implementation of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. And we feel that, with sustained investment, you will continue to see that investment improve \$700 billion worth of values just within those 21 landscapes.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Great. Has funding been dispersed to all 21 landscapes, including identified landscapes in Southern California?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. Southern California is one of the landscapes. We also have some in Northern California, and we have them across the West primarily, and we have about \$1.8 billion that have been identified to work on that. And we have treated approximately 1 million acres within the 21 landscapes so far.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Great. And what will happen to your progress treating critical landscapes when the funding runs out?

Mr. MOORE. I would like to ask Congress what happens if it runs out, because all of the progress that we are building and creating would be at risk or at jeopardy. Because once we create these conditions, what we don't talk about quite often is maintaining those conditions that we have invested in creating, and it is very critical.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Yes, thank you. There have been some narratives out there that conservation and climate resilience is a misplaced priority. But the reality is that the investments made possible from those funding bills have allowed the Biden administration to support sustainable management and restoration where there is an important need to reduce wildfire risk or to restore ecosystem integrity. Do you want to add to that?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. I can't underscore the value that both the BIL and IRA legislation has provided the Forest Service in creating and really getting at what we consider the biggest challenges to our forests, which are wildfire, disease, and insects. And there are a lot of reasons for that, but it is something that we continue to fall behind because we have not had the resources to address the issues.

One example is when we look at the deferred maintenance that we have across the agency, it was at \$8.6 billion. With GAOA, it has given us an opportunity to start looking at some of that backlog that we have. And when you look at some of the biggest challenges within that, roads, dams, and bridges create about \$5.4 billion of that \$8 billion of backlog.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you. There is also this narrative that you all have still failed to meaningfully ramp up the number of acres treated. But you have said before that the performance is restricted by budget decreases and hazardous fuels reduction, and across-the-board increases of operational costs. In my last few seconds, do you want to add to that?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I think one of the really strategic questions for this Committee and for us as well has to do with how do we report, or what are our performance metrics? Because the way that we have reported over the last 100 years, we need to diversify how and

what we report if we are going to move into this future that is here.

And what I mean by that is not just outputs, but outcomes of the work that we are doing on the landscapes because of the values that it benefits and protects.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize the gentleman from Idaho, Mr. Fulcher.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and, Chief Moore, it is a pleasure to see you again. Thank you for being here and for your work. We are clearly here to talk about the proposed budget, but that is directly impacted by the use of resources that your department impacts. So, I am going to kind of follow a line of discussion in that vein if OK with you.

And you are familiar with my state, we have had conversations before. We have about 34 million acres in Idaho that is managed by the Federal Government. And the timber industry is a huge part of that, and a major industry and a major concern for us.

And Chairmen Westerman and Tiffany also talked about the closures of mills and whatnot that is having an impact on all of us. We are not immune from that. In fact, just within the last few days, a major mill, Stimson Lumber Company in Idaho, just announced that they will be closing. And I am going to quote the CEO, a part of his statement here. According to the CEO, "Over time, the supply of the size of timber processes has declined, and so we have had to reduce our production."

And if I recall correctly, you have talked in the past, in previous testimony, about the need for low-value materials and markets for those materials. So, I just want to open this up and get your feedback.

To me, it is pretty clear that we have an issue of access to supply. That is one component. We have the issue of the processing or the mills. And then we have the issue of the markets. And if our numbers are correct, Chief Moore, about a third, a little less than that, 30 percent of the U.S. supply of lumber, of wood products comes from outside of the United States, with Canada and China being at the top of those import nations.

So, from my vantage point, it is not a market issue that we have. It is an access to resource issue that we have. There is not a shortage of timber in Idaho. There is not a shortage of timber in the United States. But there appear to be very significant constraints, and those constraints are shutting our mills down.

I just want to open that up, and that is my monologue, but I would like to get your commentary, as well.

Mr. MOORE. Yes. Thank you, Congressman. This issue that you raise, you are correct in so many different ways. Some of these things that you may not be aware of, though, are the market conditions, because markets are playing a role in this.

And to give you an example, I look at just Idaho alone. And in Idaho, as of May 4 this past month, we sold 137 million board feet there. Also, as of May 4 in Idaho, we have about 580 million board feet of timber that has been sold, but not yet cut. So, it is not cut because of market conditions, and it is playing a significant role in—

Mr. FULCHER. But Chief, if I could just interject for a second, how are Canada and China able to come into our country—maybe not Idaho specific, but into our country—and compete, if that is true?

Mr. MOORE. Well, it is true. And we do business with a lot of countries, but I am only giving you the data that I have. And I am saying, if I had to look nationally at that same number, Congressmen, we have 8 billion board feet that have been sold that is not cut.

So, there is a lot going on that is not being discussed or talked about, and I think that we need to be really transparent in what is really going on across the country. Because what you are saying is correct, but also what I am saying is correct. And there are conditions that we are not talking about that also have a significant role in what is going on across our—

Mr. FULCHER. I know we are out of time, but I really, sincerely want to connect with you and have further conversations, because if there is a scenario where any other country with a product, with the amount of freight involved and processing and whatnot, that can ship to our country and outcompete our domestic sourcing, there is something that has to be looked at that is just not right, that needs attention. And, unfortunately, I think it needs congressional intervention.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. FULCHER. I am out of time. I thank you for your exchange, and I sincerely want to continue this beyond this discussion.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. MOORE. I would love to, by the way.

Mr. FULCHER. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. And as I stated previously, and I am sure the gentleman from Idaho heard that, we are going to be engaging with the Chief offline here, and you are sure welcome to join us in regards to that. We want to see the numbers that they are producing, as well as the other numbers that are being produced by other folks who follow this very closely.

Chief, I hope you can take a little break here, because we do have to cast a couple votes. We will be back here as promptly as possible.

The Committee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

Mr. TIFFANY. The Committee will be in order.

I would now like to recognize the gentleman from Colorado for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief Moore, last year, I asked you questions regarding wildfire, specifically on thinning and fuels management. You concurred that healthy forests should have between 50 to 80 trees per acre, as opposed to 250 to 300 that national forests near my district have. As I said last time, in the fall of 2020, Colorado saw the two largest wildfires in state history: the Cameron Peak Fire and the East Troublesome Fire. Most of these happened on Federal land.

Despite robust funding, fuel material continues to pile up on Federal lands. In fact, the Fiscal Year 2025 presidential budget request asks for more money while targeting 200,000 less acres than

last year. Has there been any change since we spoke on the Forest Service's position on tree thinning and fuels management?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, we are constantly looking at fuels management. And in Colorado, particularly along the Front Range, that is one of our priority landscapes. And we have ramped up treatments in the Front Range landscapes, so we are making, actually, a lot of progress there, Congressman, in terms of what we are able to do in terms of treatments on those landscapes.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK, very good. Also, the last time that you were in front of this Committee, you resisted the Forest Service using fuel-related categorical exclusions, and that is why I introduced the Locally-Led Restoration Act to provide flexibility in stewardship contracts while focusing on wildlife mitigation through fuel removal.

So, my question is, you mentioned collaborating with community leaders. Please share what conversations, if any, you have had regarding stewardship and timber contracts with industry.

Mr. MOORE. We have had a number of memoranda of understandings and agreements with some of the industry folks.

One of the latest ones we have had was with NAFO, the National Association of Forest Owners, and one of the contracts there had to do with the timber owners or the landowners. We have agreed to allow them to jump on a fire if it is in their area during an initial attack. That has been in place for a year now. And we went back and did an after-action review this past winter to look to see if there was any value to that, and we found out, with the timber and forest owners, that there was value. In fact, we saw a couple of fires that they were able to get to that could have grown into larger fires.

The other agreement that we have with the industry is to look at opportunities after a fire for reforestation. So, we entered into an agreement, actually, with Sierra Forest Industries. And in that agreement, they have reforested some of the national forest-managed land as they were doing theirs. And I think we had about 120 acres this past year on that.

So, we are looking at a lot of different opportunities that partner with industry and other community leaders to look at bringing them into the decision space on what we do out there.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK, that is good to see that progress being made.

What this bill would do, as I just mentioned, is instead of all-or-nothing contracts, it lets there be a counteroffer, which is prevalent in the private sector but for some reason doesn't exist with Forest Service. So, I would love to see that legislation go forward, give you that authorization as another tool in the toolkit and another way for industry to be relevant in this space.

I have also proposed using private sectors in whatever areas I can in all kinds of government service areas. There is a shortage of lumber and wood products during the pandemic, for instance, yet timber harvests have dropped since the early 1990s and wildfires have continued to skyrocket.

The United States produced 112 million board feet in 1987, but in 2022 less than 5 million board feet. So, production has gone down while wildfires have gone up. You mentioned the problems

with litigation. Are there other things that could be done to restore some balance here?

No one is talking about clear cutting millions of acres, but having some kind of balance with American jobs and products so we don't have to import so much from other countries.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congressman, I have committed earlier with Chairman Tiffany to really take a look at our data because the information that you just shared, I have different information that says the opposite.

And I think you can sometimes have a seesaw effect from year to year about what timber is, but my data is telling me that we have seen slight increases over the last 20 years, actually, to the tune of about 30 percent. So, I would like to be able to sit down, and I have agreed already to sit down with Committee members here to go into a bit more detail on sharing that information.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would now like to recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. McClintock, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Chief Moore. I am having nostalgic feelings for our meetings over the last 16 years, and I am very pleased to welcome you as the Chief of the Forest Service here today.

A lot has happened in those 16 years, and it is heartbreaking. I am sure you have had the same experience. In my drives through the Sierra Nevada, whether it is to Yosemite or Lake Tahoe, Sequoia-Kings Canyon, or drives up to the Oregon border, beautiful forests that we used to take for granted are now simply gone. They have been reduced to scrub brush and dead tree trunks as far as the eye can see.

I asked my staff to look into that because, is this an optical illusion, what do the statistics say? And their estimate is that about 25 percent of our national forests have burned down in the last 10 years. Does that comport with your general figures?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I don't have the specific number, but I wouldn't argue with that number, Congressman. A lot has burned.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. A quarter of our national forests gone, simply gone. Now, I am sure they will grow back in a century or two, but they are gone for all of us for the rest of our lifetimes, and for our children's lifetimes.

The Forest Service was supposed to protect our forests, and for generations they did.

[Chart.]

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. And getting to Mr. Lamborn's point, I asked our staff to chart the board feet harvested out of the Federal forests and the acreage burned in our Federal forests. And this goes back from 1962 to 2022. You see the blue bars here? That is board feet harvested out of the national forests. The orange bars, that is acreage burned. And there is nothing subtle about this trend. It is dramatic.

And you are right, it may vary from year to year, but you take a look at what has happened. As the Federal timber harvest has dropped precipitously, acreage burned has grown precipitously.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. And we agree that about a quarter of those forests have now been destroyed by these policies.

You and I both know that excess timber is going to come out of that forest in only one of two ways. Either we are going to carry it out or it is going to burn out. What do these charts tell you?

Mr. MOORE. Well, they don't tell me anything different than what they are telling you. I mean, I don't think it is a big secret we are not managing to the degree that our forests need.

We also don't have——

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. And why aren't we? Because this is one of the great ironies. You look at the private landowners. In California, about half of the forests are privately owned. They are kept in excellent condition, and the landowners make a lot of money doing that. The Federal forests are absolutely decrepit. Again, one quarter of them destroyed. Yet, we lose money. What is the difference?

Mr. MOORE. The difference, and you may or may not care to hear this, but the difference is we don't have the resources to manage the forests to the degree that they need to be managed.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Well, we used to, and we used to do it for a lot less. We used to make money harvesting this excess timber out of the forests. Now it costs us money.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Not because of a lack of resources, but because the laws that have been adopted in the 1970s make it cost prohibitive for us to continue those sound forest management practices. So, not a lot gets done. And until you can acknowledge that, we are going to continue to have these discussions and these disagreements, and we are going to continue to watch our Federal forests die out and be burned out.

I do want to compliment you on your administration of the WIIN Act of 2016 that got a categorical exclusion from NEPA for forest thinning projects under 10,000 acres. That was administered in the Tahoe Basin under your leadership, and I believe that that was exemplary. I have been trying to get legislation to the Floor that will extend those policies nationally. Would that help or hurt the cause of the forests?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congresswoman McClintock, you and I go back quite a ways. And one of the benefits that we have gotten from some of your legislation was the 5,000-acre CE there on the Tahoe area. And that was very beneficial in actually creating and supporting an industry that was nearby.

So, there are opportunities to——

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. I think it actually saved the city of South Lake Tahoe from the Caldor Fire. It hit a treated tract under that authority. The fire laid down, and firefighters were able to put it out. But I am having a hell of a time getting that onto the House Floor for a vote, despite the fact it came out of this Committee with a somewhat bipartisan vote. And with your experience with these policies, I would hope that we can get that into law, but we have to overcome a problem here in this House.

But thank you for being here today. Thank you for your work all these years.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I now recognize the gentlelady from New Mexico for 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief Moore, thank you so much for being here with us today. I am Melanie Stansbury. I represent New Mexico's 1st Congressional District, which includes the Albuquerque area and 10 counties in central New Mexico.

I want to start by, first of all, saying thank you. We had a fairly large wildfire break out in Lincoln County on the southern tip of my district just 2 weeks ago. And your incident command and all of the Forest Service guys who are out on the ground have done just an exemplary job, and I wanted to commend them and thank them for all of their work. In the early days of that fire, there were some communication challenges with some of the local residents, but your incident command got there, and they now have it almost completely contained, folks are back in their homes. So, I just want to say thank you.

Oftentimes, the Forest Service doesn't get their flowers for the good work that they do, so we really appreciate it. And I also want to say thank you to all the hotshot crews and firefighters who are out there on the ground.

I am sure a lot of this has been covered this morning, but obviously we are seeing a huge increase in both the number of fires and intensity of fires. And in New Mexico, this is certainly the case across the state. And the wildfire season is shifting dramatically earlier. I mean, we are already having fires across the state, and it is only May. And the questions I wanted to ask today are really about community collaborations with the Forest Service and resources that are available. And I want to kind of ask them in two tranches.

One is about resources that are available to help communities that want to engage in forest thinning and treatments to help prevent fires, as well as some of the challenges we are seeing working with utilities, especially with climate change and how it is changing mitigation activities.

So, if we could start talking about utilities, one of the challenges that we are seeing in New Mexico is that the current guidance, both from Forest Service and just the way in which utilities have managed their power lines, and I know this is true in California, as well, is that they had certain easements and cutbacks in terms of how close the forest was allowed to grow to the power lines. I believe it was 3 years ago we had the McBride Fire in Lincoln County, where we had 90-mile-an-hour winds, and we had a sapling that crossed with a power line, and basically ignited a massive fire. And the utilities were in the correct cutback zone, but with that kind of wind intensity it still happened.

One of the things we are hearing, and I know this is a problem across the West, is that utilities just don't have the resources. And Forest Service, of course, is also strapped in terms of manpower to get those mitigation easements cleaned up. So, talk to us about what resources are available. In my personal opinion, it is not acceptable to cut power to communities for days at a time. And absent resources, that is what our utilities are talking about doing. So, what is available? How do we deal with this problem?

Mr. MOORE. First of all, thank you for that question, because we have been actively engaged with the utility industry over the course of the last couple of years because we know that that is a real critical area in the contributions to fire or mitigation from fire.

Some of the things that we have done, and we started this in California, where we have streamlined our processes so that utility companies don't have to come and get permission every time they do routine maintenance under their power lines. And we have been doing that across the country over the last couple of years, trying to see where and how we can streamline processes so that we are not a limiting factor for treating underneath those power lines.

The other issue, which we don't talk about too, though, is the whole issue around liability. And it is something that is there. We are going to have to have those tough conversations around it. And there are no solutions right now, but that is one of the biggest challenges that I see, particularly for the small, rural cooperatives. They just don't have the ability when fires strike.

So, it is a critical area for us. We have to look at that because, just like you, I don't see any scenario where we are not going to provide electricity to a lot of our rural users.

Ms. STANSBURY. Yes. And at the end of the day, it is not just a climate mitigation issue and a public safety issue. I mean, this is people's lives on the line. We are talking about in Lincoln County, for example, if they cut power to a community like Ruidoso, we are talking hospitals, clinics. I mean, this is going to actually impact real lives and the local economy in this rural area.

The other piece I get asked all the time is that we have 23 Tribal Nations in New Mexico. They absolutely would like to partner with the Forest Service to do forest treatments, but are struggling to identify where the money is, how to engage in those conversations. What part of the Forest Service is the best point of contact to understand how to access these infrastructure and IRA monies and those co-stewardship agreements?

Mr. MOORE. Well, typically, depending on the location, they should be contacting the forest supervisor. And if that forest supervisor is not available, I mean, the regional forester.

But my office, if you just can't get any help, for someone like you, if you contact me or my office, that is another way to get that pushed down.

But normally, if everything was working as it should be, then our tribes should be working with the forest supervisor.

Ms. STANSBURY. Excellent. Maybe a follow-up on this, and we would love to engage with you all on this, is to ask your forest supervisors at large to do more proactive engagement with our tribes and consultation on funding resources available.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Congresswoman, I don't know if you aware, but we have developed a whole Tribal Action Plan, and a part of that plan is to educate the entire workforce on tribal issues. So, we have moved to make great strides in that area. In fact, we have changed our State and Private Forestry name to State, Private and Tribal. And we are making tremendous strides in trying to improve the relationships with a lot of our tribal communities.

Ms. STANSBURY. Excellent. Well, I think at the end of the day, it really comes down—



Mr. TIFFANY. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. STANSBURY. Oh, I am just going to wrap up my sentence.

We would love to engage with you on that issue. It is really important to our Tribal Nations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Mr. TIFFANY. You are welcome for the extra time.

I would like to recognize the gentleman from Oregon for 5 minutes.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Chief, for being here today. I also want to thank you for the prompt response to my concern raised at our last meeting regarding the tribal stewardship contracts out in Oregon. And there was a prompt reaching out, and we very much appreciate that.

Also, I want to give a shout out to Merv George for his work. It has been excellent, and we are very appreciative of his work and yours in putting together the memorandum of understanding on allowing private parties to suppress fires on Federal land in Oregon. That is hugely important, given the checkerboard nature of which you are all too familiar with of that land. So, perhaps a comment of why you supported the MOU that allows private parties to go on Federal land and put out fires.

Mr. MOORE. One of the things that we want to do is bring the community into the decision space on some of the things that are taking place. No one cares about the community better than the people that live in those communities, so bringing them to the table and not just to get their opinion, but also giving them decision space, it is the right thing to do, and it is the necessary thing to do.

And what we are finding, by bringing the community into discussion, is that we are getting better-supported solutions. And that is one of the solutions. You may or may not be familiar with what just happened yesterday in the Bend area, having a tentative agreement on the homeless issue there. And I would say that just having a lot of different entities engaged in solutions and discovering solutions has really been a win-win for everyone.

Mr. BENTZ. Well, we hope for that outcome in and around Bend, for sure. It has been a long time coming. But yay.

Let's talk about the amount that people are being paid right now to fight fires. And one of the situations that has occurred is that the people actually that are contracting have had pay increases imposed upon them for \$10 an hour, I think, for those that are out fighting fire. But that \$10 did not extend to the folks who had been there longer. And as a result, what we have are people at the lower end of the pay scale getting a \$10-an-hour increase, but people at the higher level, no. And that is creating incredible difficulties.

My understanding is that you folks have been working on this, but there has been no resolution. Can you bring us up to date on how this is—

Mr. MOORE. Are you talking about the pay bump that the firefighters got?

Mr. BENTZ. Yes.

Mr. MOORE. There was actually a \$20,000 pay bump for GS-10s and below. And a part of that was to get at the issue around

retention that we were having across the agency. And the other thing is that we had to do this because you could work at a fast food restaurant and make more than a number of our firefighters were making—

Mr. BENTZ. Right, I don't think I am talking about Federal employees. I think I am talking about contract employees that are working for people who are contracting to do firefighting.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I am not familiar with that. I know we are required on the Davis-Bacon Act to pay appropriate wages. I would be happy to follow up with you to get more specifics on that particular issue.

Mr. BENTZ. Please, if you would, we would very much appreciate that.

Mr. MOORE. OK.

Mr. BENTZ. Also, there has been an issue raised that has to do with the nature of Forest Service contracting when it comes to going for the cheapest possible bid as opposed to the more quality, experienced, long-term contracts. And this is a decision made inside the Forest Service. And the result has been perhaps less money paid out, but perhaps not the quality of the project being done that all of us want. Can you talk about that for a moment?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. You may be talking about getting the cheapest bid, or the best value bid would be another way. And we have been looking at exploring the best value-type contracts, because it gives a local contractor an opportunity to win a number of those contracts.

Here again, if I had specifics on specific contracts, I can give you a specific response or answer. And I would be happy to follow up with you.

Mr. BENTZ. No, thank you for that, and we will get you those specific instances of where long-term folks who have been doing the job quite well suddenly are being outbid by people that come in from goodness knows where, and the job that gets done is not what you, I think, or I would want from a quality standpoint.

My last question has to do with the success of the categorical exclusion as a device to get us into the woods. What is your comment? What is your thought? Should we be, as the Congressman from California suggested, expanding upon the CEs?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, as a matter of fact, I have looked at the NEPA that we use across the country, and about 87 percent of our NEPA is done through CEs, and that is about 1,134 CEs that we have used, as opposed to about 150 EAs and about 7 EISs.

Mr. BENTZ. Thank you so much.

I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields. I would now like to recognize the gentlelady from New Mexico, Ms. Leger Fernández.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. For 5 minutes.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you very much, and thank you, Chief Moore. We talk often.

And I really want to thank you for advocating for comprehensive pay, the \$20,000 bump you just talked about for housing, because we need to make sure that our forest fighters and the people who not just fight the forests, but who care for the forests have housing,

addressing mental health, and the well-being of our Federal firefighters. Those of us who live among the forests and play among the forests know the hard work that they do and the sacrifices that they endure on behalf of the communities and those firefighters, and they are often from those communities, and I think that that is really key.

I also want to thank the heroic men and women who are presently fighting the Indios wildfire in my district. As you know, we have several wildfires going in New Mexico.

And I was struck by the fact that in 2022, Congress appropriated \$10.8 billion to the Forest Service. Is that correct?

Mr. MOORE. Through the BIL and IRA, you mean?

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Yes.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, that is right.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. And then, according to your written testimony, that same year the Forest Service contributed \$44.3 billion to our country's GDP. So, we invested \$10.8 billion in the Forest Service, we got 400 percent back as a return on investment. And I think that that is really important for us to think about when we are thinking about these budgets, is that we are investing, that they are investments. They are not something that goes away, they are not frivolous. It is not waste. They are investments, and they are giving us a tremendous return.

Now, when you are thinking about investments, though, because of Republican cuts you are operating on an \$8.2 billion budget, and that is a 25 percent cut from 2022. Correct?

Mr. MOORE. Right.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. So, I think we go back to that we have to invest in those places that protect us and those places that generate the kind of revenue we are talking about.

But I want to go to something that maybe might be seen by some as small, but by the communities that are impacted, it is very large, and that is cemeteries. It is my understanding that if a cemetery is on Forest Service land and a community would like to have that cemetery returned to them, the Forest Service must go through an expensive process of evaluation: is there a reason for transferring it, is there authority, what is the dollar value? And there is a long, bureaucratic process for transferring back to a community a place where they have buried their ancestors, where you know you are not going to do anything else with that cemetery because it is hallowed ground. Is that right?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, that is something that we should really talk more about because you are right, we are not going to do any kind of management activities on those lands. And as you know, too, we are required to follow laws and procedures, but I think we would be willing to sit down and see what would be a wonderful solution to this issue that you are bringing up.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Right. I think an amendment to the Small Tracts Act, so we will look forward to working with you on that because I think anybody around this rotunda would recognize that that is something that we are going to need to transfer back to those people whose ancestors are there.

The other thing, Chief Moore, I think the first time you and I spoke was after the first fire that the Forest Service started in New

Mexico that got out of control, and I know you did a review, but we also asked for a Government Accountability Office review, a GAO review. That is now coming to completion.

And while I welcome what you have done in yours, I think it was essential that we have that independent look that looked at all fires because we started with that one, and then we had a second one where you walked away from the campfire, as I call it. Nobody should walk away from the campfire. So, you haven't seen the report yet, but I think I am going to be asking you for a commitment to implement what the GAO has identified. Can you give me that commitment?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. In fact, I would be really interested in seeing what the GAO report has.

As you may recall, right after that Hermits Peak Calf Canyon Fire, I called a 90-day pause on all prescribed burns across the agency. And in that process, we looked at all of our prescribed burning, and we made some recommendations that we are living by today in that.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Well, we are not living by all of the recommendations, or not living by everything that you have committed to me. I mean, we need to really make sure that the drones and the infrared technology is being deployed for prescribed burns. There are some things that we need to get done. And in your initial report following Hermits Peak, there were a lot of issues, and "Oh, but we did everything right," and it is like you had a whole list of issues that were done wrong. So, I think we need to be careful, because sometimes you have wanted to have it both ways. We are going to be doing this, but also then not truly, truly owning the mistakes that were made.

So, hopefully, the GAO report will give us new insight, and hopefully you will be willing to make sure they get implemented.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, and I can give you an example of it. I know you are real big on the use of drones to monitor fires. And we have committed to using drones where necessary and when necessary.

One of the challenges that we really have from drones is that we have a requirement that we cannot use drones with Chinese products in them. And a drone without that, in many cases, it costs us \$80,000 for each one, as opposed to a much cheaper drone using other types. So, we have to work that out from a budget standpoint, as well.

But we are working on that. We are committed to it, and we know that the technology is rapidly changing every day. And while we may not have that opportunity now, we think that in the future, because of the development of the technology, we would be able to use that going into the future.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Right. Well, the Biden administration has been real big on making sure that we bring manufacturing back home.

But we have gone over our time. These New Mexican women, we just want to have long conversations, Mr. Chair.

Mr. TIFFANY. No comment.

[Laughter.]

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. I yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. I would just gently chide my colleague from New Mexico in regards to the Republicans reducing funding in the latest appropriations bill for the U.S. Forest Service. Take a look at the number of people on the other side of the aisle that voted for that bill that reduces funding.

I recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. LaMalfa, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity.

Thank you, Chief Moore, for appearing today. We go back a long way, don't we?

Mr. MOORE. We do.

Mr. LAMALFA. To the West. So, let's talk about the harvest numbers for a moment here. I would like to understand better how you are arriving at a 30 percent increase over, how many years was it, 20?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, the last 20 years.

Mr. LAMALFA. Because with the chart I have, the information and the trend seems to be over a much longer period of time, where harvest being these olive-colored ones here, going from this is still the late 1980s right here, 12 billion board feet down to the low of about 2002. So, if you start at 2002 and trend up from there, you could see a slight increase, but a fairly flat one in board feet, but a dramatic drop-off from here. And then doggone it, it coincides with acres burned, vastly increasing at that point, too, as we have suffered so much in the West especially on that.

So, I would like to understand how you are arriving at board feet harvested, is that the terminology you would like to use on that?

Mr. MOORE. Sold, board feet sold.

Mr. LAMALFA. Sold, sold. So, does that mean it is delivered?

Mr. MOORE. That means it is sold. I will give you an example. And we can break it down by each area.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, time is short, and I am not going to get New Mexico time, probably. But board feet sold versus actually delivered. I want to know how many feet are coming out of the forests in marketable timber, lumber.

Mr. MOORE. Well, that was it. I mean, our target this year is 3.2 billion board feet.

Mr. LAMALFA. Which is a lower number than last year, yet there is projected to be a lower number for following years. But we had these huge numbers years ago.

Mr. MOORE. Well, it is more than what we actually achieved last year.

Mr. LAMALFA. Achieved, yes, but you fell short of the goal by about a quarter billion board feet of last year's goal.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, there is a lot that is not being brought up in this conversation, so I—

Mr. LAMALFA. And it is tough, 5 minutes at a time here. But when you talked about litigation a bit earlier stopping you from hitting that goal by a quarter billion feet. Just an idea, I am not trying to be mean here, but why wouldn't you open more bids so that you have more being litigated at the same time, and more of them actually fall through the hole and make it, and then reach the number?

Mr. MOORE. Well, that would be an approach, Congressman, but that is not the one that we are choosing to do, simply because we don't have—

Mr. LAMALFA. Why don't you choose to do more? Because we are suffering out here.

Mr. MOORE. We don't have the ability to do more than what we are currently doing—

Mr. LAMALFA. You just had a massive influx of money here from the IRA recently. They told us at a hearing in Spearfish, South Dakota, they said, "We have more money right now than we have ever had." Yet, they still wanted \$20 million more to do a project there that the Nyman Company needed. They have just laid off 50 workers there at their plant in Spearfish because they can't keep up. They can't get out in the forest enough to do, they need about 120 million board feet to do the job. And as of March, they only had 10 million over the whole year. So, they have since subsequently laid off 50 people there. We have lost 50 mills in the last 18 months or 15 months or so. I don't know where the infrastructure is going to be to process what it is the output is.

Let me ask a number from you here. If we are putting out 3.1 to 3.4 billion, how many board feet are being grown in your forest in a year? How much are the trees just out there growing per year?

Mr. MOORE. There were about three or four questions there, so—

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, just the one. How many board feet are you growing on your 193 million acres, do you think, annually?

Mr. MOORE. Well, how I am going to answer you is that there are different ways to look at that. And I know some of your friends in the industry are giving you a number. They are looking at—

Mr. LAMALFA. I don't have a number off the top of my head. No one has given me a number. I am asking you, sir.

Mr. MOORE. Well, we are cutting below the ASQ, if I looked at all the plans across the country. And we are cutting that below ASQ because we don't have the resources to cut more than what we are currently cutting.

Mr. LAMALFA. Do you think we are growing about 6 billion board feet per year out in our forests, maybe?

Mr. MOORE. I can't give you that with any confidence.

Mr. LAMALFA. It has to be in that ballpark, 5 to 6 billion. But we are cutting 3, 3½ as a goal. So, over a period of time, how are we going to ever keep up with the amount of board feet that are growing and the density we are talking about?

Ms. Stansbury was talking about the power lines a little bit, and I hope people can support the farm bill because I have a piece in there to expand the gap between power lines and the forests from 10 feet to 50 feet, and we had to pass a law in 2018 to direct your agency to be more timely in getting permits out to take hazardous trees.

And we are trying to build upon that because 10 feet is not a lot when the power line is shorter than the trees next to it. I would like it even wider than 50, if you want to take it, because, as Ms. Stansbury said, we are shutting down people's power. Like in Tehama County, sometimes I drive through there in the past, and the whole county is shut off at night in Northern California

because the wind might blow in this first-world country and cause a power line problem.

So, we need a lot better output on board feet taken because it is not keeping up. And I would certainly like to hear more about your numbers on how you come up with that trend over the 20, 30 years versus an actual decrease in what you are expecting to do the next 2 years with 200 million board feet.

Let me close on the idea that you are trying to free up \$1.36 billion to take it into emergency spending, which means a lot more discretionary. Do you intend to purchase electric vehicles with this freed-up money that is going to be in your main budget now?

Mr. MOORE. I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised if we do purchase some electric vehicles.

Mr. LAMALFA. Will that be in the forest, or will they be running around in DC with those?

Mr. MOORE. Congressman, I understand your position on this.

Mr. LAMALFA. No, I am just asking the question, though. Are you going to buy a bunch of electric vehicles?

Mr. MOORE. Well, the other thing that we are trying to do to complement that is also look at electric plug-in spots on some of our campgrounds so that the people that do have electric vehicles can plug in while they are out visiting the recreation.

Mr. LAMALFA. But we don't have enough money to help the Spearfish, South Dakota to be able to get their timber harvest done.

I had better yield back, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. We are off New Mexico time now. I would like to recognize the gentleman from Utah.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you.

Mr. TIFFANY. And before you start, Mr. Curtis, the Chief has agreed that we are going to evaluate these numbers that are being put out. We are seeing some discrepancies. And we are going to work together with the Chairman of the Full Committee and others to match our numbers up, and see exactly where we stand. And I really appreciate the Chief and his willingness to be able to do that.

Mr. Curtis.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief, thank you for being with us. I don't know how familiar you are with Utah. Have you ever been to Utah?

Mr. MOORE. Lots of times.

Mr. CURTIS. Two-thirds of the land in Utah is owned by the Federal Government. I have parts of my district that are 90 percent. So, you can see right off, if we are not getting the help and the coordination that we need from the Federal Government we are literally shut down as a state. And I would like to bring up some specifics with you today.

As part of this experience in Utah and these amazing recreational areas, we are very dependent on local guides who can provide education, who can provide safety as people go into these areas. You can see sometimes if people go into these areas by themselves, it is hugely problematic. Yet, our local guides are experiencing great frustration, as am I, in their ability to get permits to do that. And my office has been working with the leadership of

the Salt Lake Ranger District to address primarily two issues: first, the refusal to turn temporary permits into long-term priority use permits; and more recently, the termination of access to the Lone Peak Wilderness Area, where guides have been going for decades, and was recently reaffirmed in the 2022 permits, as is consistent with the management plan.

Yet, frankly, I am frustrated, they are frustrated, and I have sent you a detailed letter which I would like to enter into the record that explains the situation.

Mr. TIFFANY. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

**Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC**

June 3, 2024

Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary  
US Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Outfitter and Guide Permits on the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write today with serious concerns regarding the management of outfitter and guide permits on the Salt Lake Ranger District (SLRD) of the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest (UWCNF). For many years, there have been unnecessary limitations imposed on outfitters and guides seeking to operate in this Ranger District. Before Members of Congress became involved several years ago, the guides themselves made lengthy and sincere efforts to address these issues with the Supervisor of this forest, David Whittekiend. I enclose attached documentation of those efforts with this correspondence. We write you today because the SLRD has continued to limit access to the Forest. Most recently, the SLRD instituted an unnecessary moratorium on temporary permit holders in the Lone Peak Wilderness, which will also apply to priority permit holders at permit renewal. Furthermore, the SLRD has declined to take steps to issue long-term permits that would resolve many of these issues.

While Members of Congress and guides have tried to work with the SLRD, we regret that none of the solutions suggested have met with Mr. Whittekiend's approval. On the one occasion the Supervisor did agree to Congressman Curtis's request to rescind the termination of all temporary guide and outfitter permits last year, he subsequently revoked the guides' and outfitters' access to the Lone Peak Wilderness area where guides have worked for decades. The explanation provided by the Supervisor contradicted his own decision to allow guiding in this area just two years prior. The fact that the Supervisor revoked and then reinstated access to this area in 2022, and is now doing so again, causes confusion among the public and the guides, interferes with public access to education and safety leadership, and disrupts the activities of hard-working local business owners and their employees.

The guides and outfitters who serve the public through your permit system are instrumental in providing access to forest lands for people who are not able to visit on their own, whether due to a lack of experience, skills, or equipment. It is important to remember these people are part of the public we serve, and the public deserves an opportunity to experience their public lands with the assistance of a guide. The guides also promote safety education and Leave No Trace practices which directly support the goals of the US Forest Service. Uneducated visitors in a dangerous backcountry environment are a threat to themselves and others, potentially straining search and rescue resources.

The two primary concerns that have arisen in the last year involve: (1) the revocation of access to the Lone Peak Wilderness area, which has been available to guides for decades prior, and (2) the ongoing lack of long-term priority use permits. The reasons given for both actions appear vacuous and contradictory.



The basis provided for the inability to issue long-term permits (at an in-person meeting with the forest service supervisor, his staff, Congressman Curtis and his staff, and several guides and outfitters on November 21, 2023) was lack of personnel. Implementing more long-term permits would considerably alleviate the workload for agency staff (and guides) by reducing the frequency of permit renewals from every six months to every 10 years. The group pointed out that the Forest Service Enterprise Program was created to assist local staff with projects such as the development of long-term permit opportunities (see <https://www.fs.usda.gov/enterprise/skills-and-services.php>). The group questioned why permanent priority permits were not forthcoming to save the extra work associated with the reissuance of temporary permits each year and pointed to the Enterprise Program as a potential resource to develop long-term permits. Nothing was accepted as a satisfactory resolution. Only after Congressman Curtis described the Supervisor's position as unacceptable did Mr. Whittekiend indicate he would consider alternatives, including assuring Congressman Curtis he would work toward the development of more long-term priority permit opportunities for the temporary permittees.

Also of great concern, when winter season temporary permits were issued in January of this year, approximately 8 weeks after the November 21 meeting, the permits unexpectedly excluded the Lone Peak Wilderness. This came as a great shock to the guides, to us, and the to the public. Outfitting and guiding activities have occurred in this wilderness area for decades, and for good reason—there are highly desirable climbing, skiing, hiking, and camping opportunities that the public wishes to experience with the expertise of a guide. The guides' and outfitters' dismay at this development is unsurprising, as this issue was reviewed and addressed in 2022 when access had previously been revoked, then reinstated. The 2022 Letter To File (attached), interpreting the 2003 Wasatch-Cache Land and Resource Management Plan, states:

Given our reliance on outfitting and guiding companies to provide the valuable educational services to the public, the increased use of climbing areas in wilderness, and the increased visitation of recreational visitors in the Salt Lake Ranger District, *it appears to be contradictory to limit outfitter and guiding companies if the desired future condition is to have a well-educated public that uses National Forest system lands.* (emphasis added).

This language shows that in 2022 the Supervisor recognized that outfitters and guides are important for educating the public, particularly as more people visit the forest. Nothing has changed since 2022 to warrant this change in position. Congressman Curtis wrote a letter to Mr. Whittekiend requesting that he follow his prior 2022 interpretation and remove the prohibition on outfitting and guiding in the SLRD Lone Peak Wilderness (see letter of March 28, 2024), attached). Mr. Whittekiend refused, and specifically blamed Congressman Curtis's prior request as part of the basis for this new decision. *"This approach was necessary to expedite the request by your office and local outfitter and guides to issue winter temporary outfitter and guiding permits."*

Learning to innovate and be creative in solving challenges is something we do well in Utah and which this local office seems to resist. We, the Utah delegation, would appreciate any assistance your office can provide in reinstating outfitting and guiding access to the Lone Peak Wilderness and taking steps toward the development of long-term outfitting and guiding permits on the Salt Lake Ranger District. Thank you for your attention to these very important issues.

Sincerely,

John R. Curtis  
Member of Congress

Blake D. Moore  
Member of Congress

Burgess Owens  
Member of Congress

Celeste Maloy  
Member of Congress

Michael S. Lee  
United States Senate

Mitt Romney  
United States Senate

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you. The Utah Wasatch-Cache National Forest has been unwilling to work with us on finding creative ways to meet the needs for more priority permit holders, as opposed to temporary permit holders. Every time we meet with the Supervisor, there is a half-hearted attempt to address the limitations imposed on guides. However, a few weeks later those promises are unfulfilled and we are actually further away than when we started. That feels very punitive, and you can imagine how my constituents feel about that who are dependent on a living and provide a service to these people.

For example, after reluctantly agreeing not to terminate all temporary guide and outfitter permits last year, only after a personal plea from me and meeting with them, the Supervisor subsequently revoked their access to the Lone Peak Wilderness Area, even though he told me he wouldn't. This has led to this amazing frustration, and I regret that we couldn't resolve this with this local office and I have to bring it here in a public manner to you, but I don't know what else to do.

So, my question is, will you take immediate steps to provide more long-term outfitting and guiding permits in the Salt Lake Ranger District?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, Vice Chairman, I just recently became aware of this very issue that you are bringing up here and the letter that you sent to the Secretary. But the short answer is yes, of course. I want to work with you on a solution to this.

Mr. CURTIS. OK. If it is, and listen, I get it, a lack of resources, I can't imagine what the people out in the field are asked to deal with, with the lack of resources. Can we get the resources needed into this district so these permits can be issued?

Mr. MOORE. Will you allow me to take a look at this issue, get with the region and the forest so that I have a better understanding of what is really going on?

But I will commit to you that I will work for a solution.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you. I will take you up on that, and would love to work with you personally. You can see how important this is, right? We have these access areas. If we don't have the guides, people go in by themselves. We end up costing more resources than otherwise. And this is a livelihood for many people in our state. That is very, very important. And when they get an answer and then it changes, you can see the frustration that we have.

Mr. MOORE. Sure.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you. I would like to bring up another issue.

Not far from there is the Black Hawk Campground. In 2018, there was a serious fire up in Payson Canyon. It destroyed the campground, unfortunately. It was a very popular campground. It took a lot of pressure off other areas because of this campground. Also because of a lack of resources this campground has not been reopened since 2018.

Likewise, I will just tell you, as I met with local officials in the area last week they told me there is a sense that the Forest Service is actually intentionally gradually shutting down more and more access. And by not reopening this campground, it plays into that narrative. The people on the ground are willing to volunteer. They

are willing to bring local resources to get this campground back open.

Likewise, will you work with me to figure out how we can get this campground back open?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I will work with you on that.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you. I can't ask for anything more than that, and I appreciate your attention to these very important issues.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you.

Mr. CURTIS. Thank you. I yield my time.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields, and I will turn to the Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, for his questioning.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany.

Thank you again, Chief Moore, for being here today.

I think you and I agree on a lot of things in your testimony. In your written testimony, you use the word "access" 10 times, and I have said that we need to practice conservation through access.

I was intrigued by the very similar graphs that Mr. McClintock and Mr. LaMalfa put up that showed the harvest levels and the amount of forest fires, and how there was an inflection point. And I think we both agree that we want to see more management done on the forests to keep them healthy.

So, if we go back to where that inflection point was, it was in the 1980s and really in the 1990s where we quit harvesting, and the amount of forest fires started increasing. But if you look at the specific policies that happened then, in the West you had the spotted owl controversy. And the idea was we are going to stop harvesting and we are going to save the spotted owl. Can you tell me what is happening to spotted owl populations in the West since that policy went in place?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I think, according to my knowledge, they have continued to decline.

Mr. WESTERMAN. At about 4 percent per year is what I have read. So, the policy hasn't worked to save the spotted owl, and we can, in hindsight, decades and decades later, look back and say this was a weaponized rule just to stop management on the forests, which was really a bad idea for the species and for the forests, as well.

There was also another rule, and I emphasize the word "rule," not a law, put in place by Congress called the Roadless Rule. And I was visiting with folks from Finland the other day, and they were talking about how much pride they take in building roads and having access into their forests so they can manage better. And they were just befuddled by the idea that we build roads and then tear them out, which is a huge cost. And it is also a way to deny access when we put roads in and take them out.

How critical are roads to doing not only management, but creating firebreaks and being able to get crews in to do fire suppression when needed? How critical are roads to that?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I mean, yes, they are necessary, critical.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes. And if we don't have roads, we end up spending a lot of money with tankers dropping fire retardants.

And it just seems like we made some really bad decisions three or four decades ago that are really costing us on the backside right now.

I have a lot of U.S. Forest Service land in my district, and I have always defended the Forest Service because I think the management on the Ouachita and the Ozark is as good as anywhere in the country, although there is room for improvement.

In Montgomery County in my district, about 85 percent of the forests are Forest Service lands. I held a mobile office there a few weeks ago. Twenty-five people came in, and their issue was access on the Forest Service land. Some of them had been given tickets for riding down roads that were closed that they didn't know were closed, and then roads being closed off.

So, in what world does it make sense that we don't create more access into these forests, and that we don't leave the roads in place after we go in and do management?

I have seen it firsthand, a lot of money spent building a road, you go in and do the management, and then a lot of money spent tearing the road out and trying to return it back. Does that really make sense to do that?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I think some of the logic around that, whether we can agree on that or not, and I don't know the specific reason, but sometimes we build spec roads so that the timber industry that won the bid can go in and remove the timber, and when they are done with it, then we put the road to bed, we close it. I don't know if that is the situation there that you are referring to, but that has been somewhat of a common practice.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, these are roads that have been open for a long time. And it is the No. 1 complaint I hear on the forests in my district are people have access denied to go on these roads.

There is a crazy rule where you can drive a log truck or a passenger vehicle, but you can't drive an ATV down these roads, and that just doesn't make sense to the general public when things like that happen.

So, I would hope that we would take another look at roads and access on the forests, and use some common sense there. It seems to me like it would be a huge benefit to the Forest Service, as far as public relations go, when you don't have Members of Congress' constituents calling them all the time, saying, "Why is the Forest Service doing this crazy rule? Is it their job to keep taxpaying Americans off of the public land?" Because that is how they see it.

With that, I will yield back.

Mr. TIFFANY. The gentleman yields, and I am going to take a few minutes here for questioning. And I want to piggyback on what the Chairman was just asking there.

We just had that field hearing, as you know, Chief Moore, up in Hayward, Wisconsin in regards to access, and heard some very good stories. Currently, the Forest Service is decommissioning an average of 2,000 miles of road annually. Is that accurate?

Mr. MOORE. I don't have that information available, but I wouldn't be surprised by it, sir.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, I think that number is, I mean, think about that. That is 2,000 miles annually that are being reduced for access.

And to the Chairman's point, sometimes that road that is built to high specifications, when it is removed, it is removed at the cost to the contractor. So, the contractor is having to reduce their bid

as a result of having to pay for the cost of removing the road. So, the Federal Treasury actually ends up with less money as a result of that.

And it goes back to what the Chairman was saying, is that it just doesn't make sense to the public, and especially many of them don't know what I just shared with you in regards to the road removal. But when they hear it, they just go, duh, why are we doing these things?

So, I guess my question is, this is a growing problem in regards to access. Will you commit to working with us to bring more access to the public?

Mr. MOORE. Mr. Chairman, yes, I want to be able to work with you and all of our public on access. I also want you to be able to understand the challenges that we have, too, because sometimes we can bring up individual pieces from a common-sense standpoint, why are we doing this?

Let me just share with you, though, as I look across the agency and what we are being asked to do. We are being asked to manage a road system of about 371,000 miles. And in that 371,000 miles of roads, we are only funded at about 25 percent to do that. I don't want to close roads, and yet I am not funded to maintain the road system that we currently have. So, it is a real dilemma for us in the Forest Service to be able to do that.

So, I am not surprised. I am disappointed that we have some common-sense kinds of things that we can't come to an agreement, and I want to work on those types of things.

Mr. TIFFANY. I would just share with you that I think there are people locally that are willing to help in regards to this. I think there needs to be greater engagement in that regard, because that is what we heard at the hearing, is that there are people, including private individuals, that are willing to help out in this process to be able to make this happen.

The other thing is that some would say that the Forest Service is far too passive in pushing back against those who want to put the restrictions in place. In fact, in the Forest Service, you have a broad range of ideologies, but there are some in the Forest Service that actually want to see greater restrictions. And that is where your leadership is valued so much is to be able to cut through that, where somebody's personal beliefs enter into public decision-making.

Mr. MOORE. Yes, but Mr. Chairman, let's take a look at that.

Mr. TIFFANY. Do you want us to report the employees that aren't—

Mr. MOORE. No, I want to be able to go out on that road that you are talking about, and let's see what is possible talking with some of the public there.

Mr. TIFFANY. OK. We will invite you up to meet my good friend, Senator Rob Stafsholt, and he will give you a tour, just as we had.

Mr. MOORE. Great.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, yes, let's see if we can do that.

And by the way, I want to thank—your staff in Wisconsin was there, Director Youngblood, and we really appreciate that she attended that access hearing.

So, the 2025 budget requests \$124 million for new land acquisitions. Is that a good idea with a backlog of maintenance?

Mr. MOORE. Well, here again, let's look at the specifics of what has been requested, because sometimes land acquisition is for better access to the public lands. Sometimes it is for more efficient management.

So, without knowing these specifics of a particular area, I would say there are different reasons for it.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes, I think with the maintenance backlog that is going on, I mean, it should be a very high bar that we will be adding to the Federal estate at this point when we hear that there is this whole maintenance backlog. How much more money do you need?

Mr. MOORE. Well, if you doubled our budget right now, Mr. Chairman, we would certainly make that work, but it wouldn't be enough to do everything that is being asked. That is how underfunded—and I just gave you an example, it was a 371,000-mile road system, and we are only funded at 25 percent of it.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, doubling the road budget would accomplish—

Mr. MOORE. Well, another example, because I can give you a specific number, but in general, when I look at the deferred maintenance backlog of over \$8 billion, \$5.45 billion of that is for roads, bridges, and dams. So, there is a lot of work to be done out there, and we are just not funded even to maintain the system that we have.

Mr. TIFFANY. Looking at those charts, two of them that you saw earlier over to my right, isn't that one of the ways that we could get there, is to harvest more wood?

Mr. MOORE. Well, yes, there is no silver bullet, so to speak. But yes, I mean, there are a lot of different ways to help us get there.

Mr. TIFFANY. In your testimony, you referred to green jobs, amongst other things that are benefits. What is a green job?

Mr. MOORE. Well, I don't know that I use that very much, but a green job is one of those jobs that I think is going to be working with the environment to keep it healthy and resilient.

Mr. TIFFANY. It was a recommendation that you put "green job" in your testimony, I take it. You don't have to answer that question. That is fine.

What is old growth?

Mr. MOORE. Well, it depends on the species in terms of how you define that. But I think, in general, it is large, older trees.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is it defined?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, it is defined by species, but basically, just for simple language, it is the older trees that we have in the forests.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, in an executive summary here that comes from both the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, it says the terms "old growth forest" and "mature forest" have not been consistently defined. Would you agree with that characterization?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, I would.

Mr. TIFFANY. Because just this past week, some constituents up in my district posed that question to staff, and they did not have an answer, similar to what you are saying here. It is not defined, correct?

Mr. MOORE. I say it is defined by different species. Different species have different age classes of what is considered old growth.

Mr. TIFFANY. But it is not defined, as it says in——

Mr. MOORE. Yes, just trying to keep it simple, there is no agreed-upon, I think, generally agreed-upon definition, other than if you look at it by species, which varies.

Mr. TIFFANY. I think the Biden administration came out with a Land Management Plan Direction for Old Growth Forest Conditions across the National Forest System. Are you familiar with that?

Mr. MOORE. I am.

Mr. TIFFANY. And the Forest Service is considering amending 128 Land Management Plans, is that right?

Mr. MOORE. That is correct, yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. And doing it through a single EIS?

Mr. MOORE. You mean for old growth?

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes.

Mr. MOORE. Yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Is that consistent with the law, to amend those 128 Land Management Plans, individual Land Management Plans, with one EIS?

Mr. MOORE. Yes. I mean, obviously, we can do that. But you have to amend all 128 plans.

Right now, one of the bigger challenges we have with old growth is there is no consistent way of how we manage old growth. So, this Forest Plan amendment is to come up with a framework for how we manage old growth, but also leave flexibility at the local level to make some decisions in how it is managed.

Mr. TIFFANY. Are you familiar with the 2012 Planning Rule?

Mr. MOORE. I used to be. Somewhat still.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. I mean, it rings a bell, right? I am not asking you for specifics here, trying to trap you, anything like that.

It says here among the 2012 rule's purposes was to provide for a transparent, coordinated process. Whereas, with what is being proposed with this old growth Land Management Plan, it says the Forest Service's willingness is to now convert its commitment to a transparent, collaborative process. Isn't there a distinction between collaboration and coordination?

Mr. MOORE. I mean, I think, generally, yes.

Mr. TIFFANY. I mean, isn't coordination identified in the law, that it is a specific process in working with local municipalities?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, it is about informing and being informed.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, if 128 Land Management Plans are done under one EIS, how are you going to coordinate with all those local municipalities?

Mr. MOORE. Well, it is going to be done at the local individual forest level. Our approach is we basically overhauled the whole planning process within the agency. So, we have three planning teams across the country: one in the West, one in the Midwest, and one in the East. And these teams will be doing most of the legwork on the analysis.

And a part of the issue we have had in the agency, too, is that you don't have the skill set at every forest to do this, and there is so much other work to be done. So, these national teams or these

regional teams will take most of the brunt of the work from the forest, so they are not overly encumbered with a forest plan revision.

Mr. TIFFANY. Let's take one, for example, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Wisconsin. Do you fully commit to coordinate with local units of government when creating this new plan?

Mr. MOORE. Yes, that is an ordinary part of what we should be doing out there, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TIFFANY. Well, those folks are ready, willing, and able to work with you in regards to this, and I appreciate you making that commitment.

And now, I am way overboard on Wisconsin time here, so I appreciate that you would take the additional time here to be as forthright as possible, and I appreciate you taking the time this morning, Chief Moore, to set a little time aside to have a real personal discussion in regards to this stuff.

We will be doing some follow-up. We appreciate you and your staff engaging with us in regards to that, because we are interested. It is clear that you are sincere about wanting to have the best outcomes possible, and we want to work with you to be able to do that.

Members of the Subcommittee may have some additional questions for you, and we will ask that the witness respond to these in writing. Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Subcommittee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, June 7, 2024. The hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for those responses.

And if there is no further business, it sure doesn't appear so, we are pretty lonely here, Mr. Chief, without objection, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:18 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

