

**WILDFIRE RISK, FOREST HEALTH,  
AND ASSOCIATED MANAGEMENT  
PRIORITIES OF 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 FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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## CONTENTS

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	Page
Hearing held on Thursday, June 7, 2018 .....	1
Statement of Members:	
Hanabusa, Hon. Colleen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Hawaii .....	4
Prepared statement of .....	5
McClintock, Hon. Tom, a Representative in Congress from the State of California .....	1
Prepared statement of .....	3
Westerman, Hon. Bruce, a Representative in Congress from the State of Arkansas .....	6
Prepared statement of .....	7
Statement of Witnesses:	
Christiansen, Vicki, Interim Chief, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture .....	8
Prepared statement of .....	10
Questions submitted for the record .....	12
Additional Materials Submitted for the Record:	
Center for Biological Diversity, et al., June 7, 2018 Letter to Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Hanabusa .....	48



# **OVERSIGHT HEARING ON WILDFIRE RISK, FOREST HEALTH, AND ASSOCIATED MAN- AGEMENT PRIORITIES OF THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE**

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**Thursday, June 7, 2018  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, DC**

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The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:18 p.m., in room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Tom McClintock [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives McClintock, Pearce, Labrador, Tipton, Westerman, Bergman, Gianforte, Bishop (ex officio), Hanabusa, Gallego, and McEachin.

Also Present: Representatives LaMalfa, Lamborn, and Gosar.

Mr. McCLINTOCK. The hour of 2 o'clock having long ago passed us, here we are for another hearing of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Federal Lands. I want to apologize for the delay. The good news is that we should not be interrupted for votes throughout the hearing.

I would ask first that the following Members be allowed to sit with the Subcommittee and participate in the oversight hearing today: Congressman Doug Lamborn of Colorado, Congressman Paul Gosar of Arizona, and Congressman Doug LaMalfa of California. Without objection, so ordered.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chairman, Ranking Minority Member, and the Vice Chairman, who we welcome today as Congressman Bruce Westerman. This will allow us to hear from our witnesses sooner and help Members keep to their schedules. Therefore, I would ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record, if they are submitted to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. today. Without objection, so ordered.

Now, we will begin with opening statements.

## **STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM McCLINTOCK, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Mr. McCLINTOCK. I have been looking forward to this hearing, because it cuts to the core of the issues confronting our forests and the U.S. Forest Service under its new Interim Chief, Vicki Christiansen.

I want to thank the Chief personally for being here today, and I especially want to thank her for making the Sierra Nevada a top priority of her tenure. A few weeks ago, Chief Christiansen took Mother's Day to fly out to California to lead a full day's tour of the mountains, the following day, at the invitation of Congressman

LaMalfa and myself. I cannot thank her enough for that conspicuous commitment and for her no-nonsense approach to our forest issues. I think Gifford Pinchot would be proud.

What we saw on that tour was a small part of the tree mortality crisis afflicting our Federal lands. Tree densities three and four times what the land can support have led to stresses that have stripped our forests of their resilience to drought, disease, pestilence and, ultimately, catastrophic wildfire.

The fires in 2017 devastated our public lands, consuming more than 10 million acres and costing the Federal Government more than \$2.9 billion to fight; and 2018 offers us no reason for optimism. Approximately 1.7 million acres have already burned, and the potential for significant wildland fires in the western United States this summer is above normal.

One of the problems facing the Forest Service is the practice of fire borrowing, using prevention funds to fight fires. This, of course, produces a negative feedback loop: the more we spend on fighting fires, the less we spend on preventing them; and the less we spend on preventing them, the more fires we have to fight.

The Omnibus spending bill provides \$20.8 billion in new budgetary authority over the next 7 years to fund fire suppression costs that exceed congressionally appropriated amounts. Unfortunately, the Omnibus was long on spending and short on forest management reforms, although it did include some important provisions: a new categorical exclusion for forest resilience projects, 20-year stewardship contracts that should increase the prospects to engage contractors, and new authorities for the construction and repair of roads to support forest management work as part of Good Neighbor Agreements. But the fundamental threat to our forests is that outdated environmental laws of the 1970s have made it endlessly time-consuming and ultimately cost-prohibitive to actively manage our timber by removing excess growth before it chokes off the forests.

This Subcommittee has held many hearings examining the morbid overcrowding of our forests, the effect it has had on forest health, and the legal and regulatory acts that have produced this crisis. Our oversight findings were incorporated into several key bills, the most prominent being H.R. 2936, the Resilient Federal Forests Act, by our resident forester and new Vice Chairman, Congressman Westerman of Arkansas. It passed the House on November 1, 2017, and has since languished in the Senate. That is a song we have heard before.

Although the Omnibus bill fell short of necessary reform, it provided what the Forest Service has asked for: some new authorities and much new money to carry out excess timber before it burns out. And let there be no mistake, those are the only two ways that excess timber comes out of the forest.

It is estimated that we currently harvest about one-fifth of the annual growth in our forests. I want you to think about that. If you had five newspapers delivered to your porch every morning and you only threw out one of them, how long would it take for your house to become a firetrap? That is the condition of our national forests today.

The purpose of today's proceeding is to hear what the Forest Service plans to do with these tools, and what additional legislation it needs to meet its mission: to manage our Nation's forests in a productive and sustainable manner.

Just as our forest health crisis was not created overnight, it will not be solved overnight. It will take clear direction and vision from the U.S. Forest Service leadership in Washington, a strong resolve and commitment in the field to complete the work on the ground efficiently and effectively, and engagement from Congress to ensure all levels of the Agency have the tools they need to get the job done.

Once again, my thanks to Chief Christiansen for her engagement, her commitment, and her efforts, and we welcome her here to testify. But first, a word from our Ranking Member.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McClintock follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. TOM MCCLINTOCK, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON FEDERAL LANDS

I have been looking forward to this hearing, because it cuts to the core of the issues confronting our forests and the Forest Service under Interim Chief Vicki Christiansen.

I want to thank the Chief for being here today, and I especially want to thank her for making the Sierra Nevada a top priority of her tenure. A few weeks ago, Chief Christiansen took Mother's Day to fly out to California to lead a full day's tour of the mountains the following day at the invitation of Congressman LaMalfa and myself. I cannot thank her enough for that conspicuous commitment and for her no-nonsense approach to our forest issues. Gifford Pinchot would be proud.

What we saw on that tour was a small part of a tree mortality crisis afflicting our Federal lands. Tree densities three and four times what the land can support have led to stresses that have stripped our forests of their resilience to drought, disease, pestilence and ultimately, catastrophic wildfire.

The 2017 fires devastated our public lands, consuming more than 10 million acres and costing the Federal Government more than \$2.9 billion to fight, and 2018 offers no reason for optimism. Approximately 1.7 million acres have already burned and the potential for significant wildland fires in the western United States this summer is above normal.

One of the problems facing the Forest Service is the practice of fire borrowing—using prevention funds to fight fires. This produces a negative feedback loop: the more we spend on fighting fires the less we spend on preventing them and the less we spend on preventing them, the more fires we must fight.

The Omnibus spending bill provides \$20.8 billion in new budgetary authority over the next 7 years to fund fire suppression costs that exceed congressionally appropriated amounts.

Unfortunately, the Omnibus was long on spending and short on forest management reforms. It included some important provisions: a new categorical exclusion for forest resilience projects, 20-year stewardship contracts that should increase prospects to engage contractors, and new authorities for the construction and repair of roads to support forest management work as part of "Good Neighbor" agreements.

But the fundamental threat to our forests is that outdated environmental laws of the 1970s have made it endlessly time consuming and ultimately cost-prohibitive to actively manage our timber by removing excess timber before it chokes off the forests.

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Once again, my thanks to Chief Christiansen for her engagement, her commitment, and her efforts, and we welcome her here to testify. But first, a word from our Ranking Member.

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**STATEMENT OF THE HON. COLLEEN HANABUSA, A  
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF HAWAII**

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I have learned throughout my tenure as Ranking Member of the Federal Lands Subcommittee, wildfire is a critical issue that impacts the lives of millions of Americans every year. Due to environmental factors such as climate change, last year was one of the largest wildfire years on record, with over 10 million acres burned throughout the country.

I have heard deeply concerning stories from my colleagues in California and other regions impacted by catastrophic wildfire. These fires have impacted Federal, state, and private land alike, burning over 12,000 structures and causing millions of dollars in damages. Since this truly impacts so many of our constituents, their loved ones, and their livelihood, I am grateful that we have this opportunity to discuss this year's wildfire outlook with the interim chief of the Forest Service.

The Forest Service is on the front lines ensuring communities are safe when a fire breaks out and implementing projects to reduce the severity of future wildfires. Unfortunately, the mitigation side of that equation has become more difficult as wildfire suppression has dominated the Forest Service budget. Over 50 percent of the Agency's budget is directed to suppression activities, which includes funds diverted from activities and projects meant to reduce the risk of large catastrophic fires. This has become an unsustainable trend, so it is encouraging that Congress was able to include a bipartisan package of reforms in the Omnibus passed earlier this year.

That package provided much needed relief to the Agency's budget that will free up resources to carry out prescribed burns and other restoration projects to decrease wildfire risk. It also included new management authorities, like updates to the Good Neighbor Authority and a categorical exclusion that will make it easier to target fuels reduction projects in areas with homes and other residential structures.

Taken together, the wildfire budget fix and the management reforms included in the Omnibus will surely ensure the Forest Service has the necessary bandwidth to keep our communities and



forests healthy. The package was the product of bipartisan negotiations and a real accomplishment in this era of divided politics.

That is why Secretary Perdue praised the passage of the Omnibus and noted the importance of the wildfire funding fix. In a statement to the press, the Secretary said, “Improving the way we fund wildfire suppression will help us better manage our forests. If we ensure that we have adequate resources for forest management, we can mitigate the frequency of wildfires and severity of future fire seasons.”

It may have taken years, if not decades, where Congress finally took steps to fix the Forest Service’s biggest problem. Our national forests draw millions of annual recreation visitors and support thousands of jobs. This Committee has the responsibility to ensure that the Forest Service has the resources it needs to care for these treasured lands.

I look forward to hearing more about how the Forest Service is utilizing the provisions of this historic deal to maximize its efforts to keep our communities safe and our forests healthy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the remainder of my time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hanabusa follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. COLLEEN HANABUSA, RANKING MEMBER,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I have learned throughout my tenure as Ranking Member of the Federal Lands Subcommittee, wildfire is a critical issue that impacts the lives of millions of Americans every year. Due to environmental factors such as climate change, last year was one of the largest wildfire years on record, with over 10 million acres burned throughout the country.

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Taken together, the wildfire budget fix and the management reforms included in the Omnibus will ensure the Forest Service has the necessary bandwidth to keep our communities and forest healthy. The package was the product of bipartisan negotiation and a real accomplishment in this era of divided politics.

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It may have taken years, if not decades, but Congress finally took steps to fix the Forest Service’s biggest problem. Our national forests draw millions of annual

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I look forward to hearing more about how the Forest Service is utilizing the provisions of this historic deal to maximize its efforts to keep our communities safe and our forest healthy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the remainder of my time.

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Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the Vice Chairman of the Subcommittee for 5 minutes, Mr. Westerman.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman McClintock. And thank you, Interim Chief Christiansen, for being with us here this afternoon. I would also like to commend you and Secretary Perdue on the willingness and the efforts that you are already making to make sure that our forests are more healthy in the future.

Today, the Subcommittee meets to examine the steps that the Forest Service leadership will be taking to aggressively implement new and existing management tools provided by Congress. Three years ago, then Forest Service Chief Tidwell indicated that nearly 58 million acres of Forest Service land were at significant risk for severe wildfire. Fast-forward to 2018, and that number has only increased. This is a result of decades of neglect and mismanagement. I have stated many times before that we are simply loving our trees to death.

Ladies and gentlemen, that death toll will continue to grow, and as a result, the number of acres burned and, unfortunately, the amount of property and even number of lives lost will likely continue to grow, even with taking aggressive steps to address the millions of acres of overcrowded, insect- and disease-infested timber owned by the Federal Government. But the sooner these steps are taken and the more aggressively they are implemented, the quicker we will turn the tide on the self-induced environmental malfeasance.

This Committee has reportedly heard from the Forest Service about the variety of reasons barring scientific management of our Nation's forests. From obstructionist litigation to lengthy NEPA reviews to budgetary constraints and fire borrowing, all were commonly cited as explanation for the underwhelming response to the growing issue of wildfire.

The 115th Congress has taken some valuable steps to address the impediments to active management. Not only did Congress allocate nearly \$20 billion of additional budgetary authority over the next 10 years, but we also included both a brand-new categorical exclusion to specifically address wildfire risk and increased the stewardship contracting ceiling to better allow the Forest Service to partner with the state, local, and tribal entities in active management.

Further, if the Senate would act, they would notice that my bill, H.R. 2936, the Resilient Federal Forests Act, passed the House

with bipartisan support and includes several additional management reforms critical to protecting the long-term viability of our Nation's forests.

Folks, Congress, in a bipartisan effort, has addressed fire borrowing. We have enhanced and empowered state and local collaboration. We have provided the Forest Service with the tools it needs to aggressively treat for wildfire and disease.

My question today is this—with these changes, what is the Forest Service going to do? Hopefully, Chief Christiansen will address that.

This crisis is decades in the making. It will take decades of sound management to restore our forests to good health. Over this window of potential progress, we will undoubtedly witness additional years of catastrophic wildfire. This year is no exception. As I speak, there are 17 major wildfires burning in nine different states. To date, over 1.75 million acres have burned nationwide, already eclipsing the numbers burned in all of 2016.

It is because of these fires, and the ones to come, that I speak with such a sense of urgency. We must examine today specific steps the Forest Service will take to address catastrophic wildfires.

I am also keenly interested in how the Forest Service leadership plans on reporting back on its progress. Transparent, detailed explanation of the specific actions taken to manage and treat diseased and overcrowded acres will be necessary to demonstrate to the American people our efforts to reverse the years and years of neglect.

With the right leadership and robust implementation, I am confident that the Forest Service can use the tools we have provided to roll back the clock on mismanagement of our Nation's forests. If we ensure that every authority, every management dollar is efficiently and effectively used to treat for wildfire, we will have success.

The ball is in the Forest Service's court. Congress has provided budgetary authority and management options. I am eager to hear today's testimony, and I am excited to learn about the steps being taken to address catastrophic wildfire.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the remainder of my time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Westerman follows:]

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

Thank you, Chairman McClintock, and thank you Interim Chief Christensen for being with us this afternoon.

Today, the Subcommittee meets to examine the steps Forest Service leadership will be taking to aggressively implement new and existing management tools provided by Congress. Three years ago, then Forest Service Chief Tidwell indicated that nearly 58 million acres of Forest Service land was at significant risk for severe wildfire. Fast forward to 2018 and that number has only increased, a result of decades of neglect and mismanagement.

Ladies and Gentlemen, that number will continue to grow—and as a result, the number of acres burned and number of lives lost will continue to grow—unless aggressive steps are taken, immediately, to address the millions of acres of overcrowded, disease-infested timber owned by the Federal Government.

This Committee has repeatedly heard from the Forest Service about the variety of reasons barring scientific management of our Nation's forests. From obstructionist litigation, to lengthy NEPA reviews, to budgetary constraints and fire

borrowing, all were commonly cited as explanation for the underwhelming response to the growing issue of wildfire.

Now, the 115th Congress has taken some valuable steps to address the impediments to active management. Not only did Congress allocate nearly \$20 billion of additional budgetary authority over the next 10 years, but we also included both a brand new categorical exclusion to specifically address wildfire risk, and increased the stewardship contracting ceiling to better allow the Forest Service to partner with state, local, and tribal entities in active management.

Further, if the Senate would wake up, they would notice that my bill, H.R. 2936, the Resilient Federal Forests Act passed the House with bipartisan support and includes several additional management reforms critical to protecting the long-term viability of our Nation's forests.

Folks, Congress has addressed fire borrowing. We have enhanced and empowered state and local collaboration. We have provided the Forest Service with the tools it needs to aggressively treat for wildfire and disease.

My question today is this: with these changes, what is the Forest Service going to do?

This crisis is decades in the making. It will take at least another decade of sound management to restore our forests to good health. Over this decade of potential progress, we will undoubtedly witness additional years of catastrophic wildfire. This year is no exception—as I speak, there are 17 major wildfires burning in 9 different states. To date, over 1.75 million acres have burned nationwide, already eclipsing the numbers burned in all of 2016.

It is because of these fires, and the ones to come, that I speak with such a sense of urgency. We must examine today specific steps the Forest Service will take to address catastrophic wildfires.

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With the right leadership, and robust implementation, I am confident that the Forest Service can use the tools we have provided to roll back the clock on mismanagement of our Nation's forests. If we ensure that every authority, every management dollar is efficiently and effectively used to treat for wildfire, we will have success.

The ball is in the Forest Service's court—Congress has provided budget authority and management options. I am eager to hear today's testimony, and am excited to learn about the steps being taken to address catastrophic wildfire.

Thank you, I yield back.

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Mr. McCLINTOCK. Thank you very much.

And now to the main attraction. The Interim Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Ms. Vicki Christiansen, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF VICKI CHRISTIANSEN, INTERIM CHIEF, U.S.  
FOREST SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me today. We appreciate the support of this Committee for the work we do.

Let me start by sharing just a bit about my background. I have been in this position for 3 months. I came to the Forest Service in 2010 as the Deputy Director of Fire and Aviation Management, and I went on to serve as the Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry. For 30 years prior to these assignments, I worked in natural resources for state government. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and I am a forester by training.

I started as a seasonal wildland firefighter for Washington State. I had several positions that emphasized managing state trust lands and wildland fire protection with the Washington Department of Natural Resources. I eventually served as state forester of Washington and then state forester of Arizona.

My passion is to connect people with their natural resources through partnerships and collaboration that are based on mutual trust. And I will lead this Agency in that spirit.

Today, I would like to cover three main points: our progress to increase work to improve forest conditions, our internal reforms, and the wildfire outlook.

Thank you to Congress for the Omnibus, the fire funding fix, and the new forest management provisions. Our most urgent priority is to increase our work to improve conditions of America's forests so they provide for the uses, experiences, and services citizens expect. With the help of members of this Committee and Congress, we are equipped with new tools and a fire funding fix to help us get more done. It is our time to deliver, and we are making steady progress.

By tomorrow, all of our regions will submit their 2-year plans on how they are going to employ the new authorities. They will include the modified Good Neighbor Agreements, the use of new categorical exclusions for wildfire resilience, optimal locations for the 20-year stewardship contracts, and use of the categorical exclusion for treatments on transmission line corridors.

We are already seeing results. We will sell 3.4 billion board feet of timber this year, while improving resiliency and health on more than 3 million acres. We have increased the number of acres we treated by 36 percent, and timber harvest rose 13 percent from last year, and we are delivering it earlier in the year. At this point, we have harvested more than 30 percent more timber than we did last year. Our 2018 timber target is the highest it has been in two decades.

We have also strengthened cooperation with states and other partners to do more work. Our increased work with states has resulted in 150 Good Neighbor Agreements in 34 states. One agreement in Utah, for example, has resulted in 36 projects that treat over 50,000 acres. Meanwhile, we are fundamentally reforming our internal processes. We are streamlining our planning for the last 8 months, and it has decreased the time to authorize projects. This has reduced cost in just this 8 months by nearly \$30 million. We have updated technology to expedite timber sales, and our shovel-ready work has also increased to build on the momentum in 2019. There is much more to do, but we are off to a productive start.

We are also prepared for another active fire season in the West. Above average wildfire activity appears to be our new normal. Forecasters predict 2018 will rival last year's historic season when the Federal Government spent a record \$2.9 billion fighting fires.

Firefighting is not solitary work. No one organization can do it alone. We rely on the cooperation and shared resources with states, tribes, Federal agencies, and local partners. With our collective resources, we maintain what we need to effectively respond. The Forest Service itself has 10,000 firefighters, 900 engines, and hundreds of aircraft available. Our firefighting efforts suppress 98 percent of all fires at 10 acres or less.

We are also taking steps to better manage cost for fire response. We know there is no blank check. We will make decisions to ensure we spend dollars in the right place that make a difference. We are evaluating and reducing cost centers to ensure we are most effective and efficient with taxpayers' dollars.

With these collective actions, we will ensure your investments make a difference to the Americans who deserve healthy, productive forests and a government that works for them.

Thank you. I am happy to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Christiansen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN, INTERIM CHIEF OF THE  
USDA FOREST SERVICE

Chairman McClintock and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the Agency's efforts to prepare for and respond to wildfires and improve the condition of America's forests and grasslands. I appreciate the Subcommittee's continued support and your recognition that this work goes beyond wildfire response, and is as much about proactively creating healthy, fire-resilient conditions on National Forest System lands so they provide for the uses, experiences and services that meet the needs of our Nation. This Congress provided valuable tools in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 (2018 Omnibus) that will allow the Agency to carry out projects that help reduce the threat catastrophic wildfires and other forest threats pose to lives, homes and communities. We will take advantage of the opportunities presented in the 2018 Omnibus and work diligently to deliver desired results.

2018 WILDFIRE YEAR

Last year was one of the most devastating wildfire years on record. Tragically, dozens of Americans were killed, including 14 wildland firefighters who perished while working to protect lives and property. Communities in the Great Plains, the Southeast, Southwest and the West were affected, with more than 10 million acres burned—an area larger than the state of Maryland—and more than 12,300 homes and other structures destroyed. It was also the most expensive year for wildfires on record: for the first time ever, we spent \$2.9 billion dollars to suppress wildfires across the Nation.

Early predictions indicate that 2018 will likely be another challenging wildfire year. According to the forecast released by the National Interagency Fire Center on June 1, 2018, significant portions of the western United States are predicted to have above average potential for significant wildfire activity between now and the end of September. States likely to be affected include Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. To date, about 1.7 million acres have burned, mostly in the South, Southwest, and Rocky Mountain regions; this number is on trend with the number of acres burned last year at this time. Wildland firefighting is not a solitary effort, and we rely on Federal, tribal, state and local partners to provide a sustained and effective response across jurisdictions. This year the Forest Service and our partners have more than 10,000 firefighters, 900 engines, and hundreds of aircraft available to manage wildfires. At this time, we believe these to be adequate resources to address wildfire activity but will continue to evaluate our needs as the fire year progresses.

Recent trends in wildfire response data suggest that increasing suppression activity appears to be the new normal. In adjusting to this new normal, the authorities provided in the 2018 Omnibus are key. I am especially appreciative of the solution to our fire funding dilemma. It is a challenge we have struggled with and worked on together for well over a decade. In Fiscal Year 2020, this comprehensive fire funding fix will ultimately stabilize our operating environment by addressing the impact of the rising suppression budget on forest management and research, and by treating catastrophic wildfires as natural disasters. Congress has dramatically reduced the need for transferring funds from our other mission programs so we can cover firefighting costs. We now have new tools and expanded authorities to help us do more to improve the conditions of our forests and grasslands. We will step up to this challenge and will do our part as an agency to get more work done on the ground.

Again, we are already developing more efficient and effective ways to do our work while taking steps to contain fire costs and ensuring we spend dollars in the right places to make a difference. We expect to demonstrate this commitment as we confront the 2018 fire year. Moreover, we will continue our internal reforms, especially in active forest management that will result in changing overly complex, time-consuming, outdated processes that delay our work on the ground. Coupled with the expanded authorities, these reforms will translate to more favorable results, production and work in our Nation's forests.

## FOREST MANAGEMENT

Congress has been very helpful in recent years, providing a number of authorities to help us get more work done on the ground. Thank you—it is helping, and we are making progress. For example, the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) provided in the Agricultural Act of 2014, and expanded by the 2018 Omnibus, has dramatically increased our cooperation with states. We now have 150 agreements in 34 states using this authority. This shared stewardship approach has generated more trust and allowed significantly more work to get done.

While the total number of GNA agreements shows real progress, that number alone does not tell the whole story. For example, in the state of Utah a single 10-year agreement between the Forest Service and the state has yielded 36 projects that will treat over 50,811 acres of National Forest System lands in Fiscal Year 2019 alone.

The new authorities provided by Congress in the 2018 Omnibus give us more tools to increase forest treatments. The combination of these new tools and the fire funding fix are already changing the way we get work done—it's no longer business as usual. Since the 2018 Omnibus was signed into law, we analyzed the new tools technically and legally, provided explicit guidance to the field, and have required the Regions to submit their plans for implementing the authorities by June 8, 2018. More immediately we have directed the Regions to modify their Good Neighbor Agreements and use the new categorical exclusion for wildfire resilience projects. The new categorical exclusion will also be available for post fire treatments this year. In addition, we are actively working with our Regions and industry partners to identify the best areas to initiate 20-year stewardship contracting, thereby maximizing in the development of new infrastructure to process forest products.

Outside of increasing the use of new congressional authorities, we have been very aggressive on improving our processes administratively to reduce the time and cost to plan and implement work on the ground. It's paying off. Our focus to streamline planning over the past 8 months has decreased the time necessary to authorize projects, reduced costs by nearly \$30 million, and resulted in more shovel ready work. But we know there is more to do.

We are also putting into place a national risk-based strategy to address wildland fuels. To that end, this year we have increased acres treated by 36 percent and timber harvest by 13 percent over last year's levels. Compared to last year, we have nearly 30 percent more timber harvested at this point in the year. Our anticipated level of timber harvest in Fiscal Year 2018 is the highest it's been in 20 years. In all, this year the Forest Service plans to sell 3.4 billion board feet of timber while improving the resiliency and health of more than 3 million acres of National Forest System lands through removal of hazardous fuels and stand treatments.

Our implementation of vegetation treatment is also getting more efficient. We have trained personnel and industry partners in every region to use designate by prescription and description methods. We have also delivered updated technology to our personnel in the field, designed to reduce the time it takes to administer a timber sale, moving us closer to industry standards.

While we are pleased with the progress we are making, we recognize that the successful delivery of services and work starts with a highly skilled, motivated workforce. Forest Service employees remain our largest and most important investment. They are essential to confronting the arduous challenges facing America's forests and grasslands. They are integral to the services and experiences we provide to citizens and local communities. A safe and respectful work environment is the foundation for everything we do at the Forest Service. We simply cannot succeed without it. The next step toward this end will be during the week of June 11 when every Forest Service employee will participate in a daylong event called *Stand Up for Each Other*. Our local leaders will convene learning sessions designed to show how we as Forest Service employees can better support each other so that we all feel valued and respected. We expect the following outcomes for all Forest Service employees from *Stand Up for Each Other*: employees will understand that harassment, assault, bullying and retaliation are absolutely unacceptable behaviors; they will all know what to do if we experience or witness unacceptable behaviors; and, our Agency as a whole will have built a collective capacity among employees to *Stand Up for Each Other*. We will continue to work in the weeks and months ahead to create the work environment each and every one of us deserves.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the Subcommittee members have for me.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MS. VICKI CHRISTIANSEN, INTERIM  
CHIEF, FOREST SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Questions Submitted by Rep. Bishop

*Question 1. Can you tell us how you are training Forest Service Agency employees to work with State Foresters to implement the new authorities provided by the expansion of Good Neighbor Authority as provided in the Omnibus?*

Answer. The national headquarters and regional offices host training sessions on the use of the Good Neighbor Authority for field offices on how to implement agreements and projects. Regions have specialists who work with forests on developing new or expanded Good Neighbor Authority agreements and they also train local staff on the latest changes. Specific training of the field staff on implementing individual projects is left up to the local forest.

*Question 2. State Foresters are responsible for producing and updating State Forest Action Plans covering all ownerships including Federal lands and focusing limited resources on the highest priorities. How is the Forest Service incorporating those plans and working with State Foresters to focus combined efforts on the highest priorities for our Nation's forests?*

Answer. State Forest Action Plans are an important tool for states to define their highest conservation priorities, resource management concerns, and long-term strategies. While each state forest action plan is unique, all plans address three national priorities: (1) Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses, (2) Protect Forests from Threats and (3) Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests.

The Forest Service provides financial assistance to state agencies to lead and deliver a variety of forestry programs through local partnerships with private landowners, local conservation and hunting organizations, academic partners, governmental partners, and others. The Forest Service prioritizes available assistance to consider the strategic priorities articulated within each State Forest Action Plan.

The 2012 Planning Rule, which guides the development, revision, and amendment of land management plans for the National Forest System, requires coordination with the planning efforts of states and also for the review of relevant planning and land use policies of other government entities (e.g., states) during Forest Service land management planning efforts.

*Question 3. To solve a problem the magnitude of our forest health crisis, the Forest Service must have a long-term vision. What is your long-term plan for increasing the pace and scale of forest management and restoration to get back to a place where we are "carrying out" more trees than are being "burned out?"*

Answer. The Forest Service is working to find solutions to this issue. There is no one solution, but by using a combination of all of the available authorized tools and the available scientific knowledge, we continue to make progress. We propose a more contemporary way of doing business: an outcome-based investment strategy. To succeed, we will continue reforming Agency policy and producing more results on the ground while also investing across boundaries and working at a larger scale. In brief, the vision includes:

- **Determining management needs on a state level.** We will prioritize stewardship decisions directly with the states, setting priorities together to focus our joint efforts and working across boundaries as well as finding ways to combine our mutual skills and assets.
- **Doing the right work in the right places and at the right scale.** We will use advanced science and new mapping and decision tools to locate treatments where they can do the most good, thereby protecting communities, watersheds, and economies where the risks are greatest. Through partnerships, we can produce more outcomes at a meaningful scale, such as supporting rural economies, reducing fire risk, and improving forest conditions.
- **Using all available tools for active management.** We will use the authorities provided by Congress to collectively do more work on the ground, including mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and managed wildfires, using a collaborative and shared decision space to choose the most appropriate tools tailored to local conditions.

This management approach for an outcome-based investment strategy is intended as a basis for further dialogue. It represents a continuation of the direction that we have been taking, and it builds on the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy to reach for a new level of collaboration.



*Question 4. The FY 2018 Omnibus provides greater flexibility for the construction, repair and reconstruction of roads as part of a Good Neighbor Agreement. This new authority will increase access to lands in need of treatment while allowing the Forest Service to leverage the increased capacity provided through Good Neighbor Agreements. The U.S. Forest Service manages forested lands in 43 states and Puerto Rico and has Good Neighbor Agreements in place in only 34 states.*

*4A. To make full use of new authorities provided under GNA, the Forest Service must have Good Neighbor master agreements in place with every state that includes National Forest System lands. Do you believe expanding Good Neighbor Agreements can help increase the pace and scale of forest management?*

Answer. Yes, we view the use of Good Neighbor Authority is instrumental in our ability to improve the condition of our forests. These partnerships will allow us not only to expand our capacity, but to also plan joint projects that will benefit larger common areas.

*4B. What is your plan to increase the number of states, territories, and forests, with Good Neighbor Agreements?*

Answer: We continue to work on implementing Good Neighbor Agreements with all the states that wish to participate. Regions and forests have and continue to reach out to their states that have not developed a partnership to determine whether there is the potential to create an agreement. Some states have said they do not have the capacity to assist. We will continue to use the tool where it works best.

*4C. You said that the number of agreements alone isn't reflective of the work being done. Is the example noted in your testimony in the state of Utah that will treat over 50,000 acres in FY 2019 typical of the pace and scale of these agreements?*

Answer: There is no one agreement that is typical of all of them. Most agreements have many projects associated with them, so looking only at the number of agreements will provide a limited perspective on what is actually being accomplished. Looking at the number of agreements within a state would indicate the breadth of the interest within the state to partner on more than one issue. For example, a state could have an agreement under their forest management division as well as their wildlife division. Identifying the number of projects or the number of acres would provide an idea of the scale of work being accomplished.

*4D. Could more be accomplished by expanding the timelines and scope of Good Neighbor Agreements? Are there any statutory or administrative limits on the USFS' ability to expand the scope and timeline of Good Neighbor Agreements? How can Congress help reduce these limitations?*

Answer: More could possibly be accomplished if there was a longer time frame allowed for Good Neighbor projects. Administratively, there is a 10-year limit on Good Neighbor Authority master agreements. This is more of an acquisition driver where there is a need to close out agreements periodically to ensure financial accountability. There are proposals being developed that would set up a special fund into which the receipts generated from Good Neighbor projects would be deposited and used to fund new projects under the current or any new master agreement.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. McClintock**

*Question 1. The King Fire in 2014 burned over 97,000 acres of the American River Watershed in the Tahoe and El Dorado National Forests. In the last 4 years, the King Fire, the Butte Fire, the Rough Fire and the Rim Fire consumed more than 1,000 square miles of Sierra forests, impacting the region's ecosystem and water resources.*

*1A. Local governmental agencies, including water agencies along with not-for-profit partners are providing significant commitments of time and money for collaborative projects to address wildfire threats on Federal and non-Federal forest lands. Is the Forest Service committed to match this effort with appropriate funding?*

Answer. Yes, we have worked collaboratively with local government agencies, and we will use the authorities we have to contribute to this important work.

*1B. In the FY 2018 budget, what resources have been allocated to implement collaborative forest restoration projects on Federal lands to reduce the threats from catastrophic wildfires? What is the Forest Service doing to expedite these projects? How many projects do you anticipate being funded in this budget year? Next year?*

Answer. In FY 2018 the Forest Service fully allocated the \$40 million in Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) funding appropriated by

Congress among 23 existing CFLR projects on the National Forest System, including 3 in California. These funds will be matched with other Forest Service appropriated dollars and partner contributions for a combined investment of at least \$80 million, as required under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

With these resources, the projects will accomplish a variety of restoration goals including mitigation of wildfire risk. Since 2009, CFLR projects treated over 2.9 million acres to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. These treatments translate into outcomes on the ground. For example, when a fire started on the Sierra National Forest last summer in an area that had seen three entries in the past 20 years, a comparison of observed/expected fire behavior within the treatment area and what expected fire behavior would have been had the area not been treated yielded a strong example of pre-wildfire mitigation through fuels reduction and fuels rearrangement. The brush component had been reduced 70–80 percent compared to adjacent non-treated areas. Dead and down fuel loading has been reduced 75 percent from adjacent non-treated areas. Ladder fuels are almost non-existent within the fire burn area. In 2017 alone, the Dinkey Collaborative CFLRP accomplished nearly 1,400 acres of prescribed fire within the CFLR landscape. With a focus on training staff alongside cooperators, the project has been able to leverage funding and capacity to accomplish larger-scale work in a relatively short amount of time.

*1C. One of the most serious challenges encountered by collaborative partnerships is regulatory certainty for a project's review and approval. The Subcommittee understands that the Forest Service published a proposed rule to improve procedures governing the use of the National Environmental Policy Act that could improve the timeliness of environmental analyses that are part of any collaboration. What is the status of this proposal?*

Answer. The Forest Service published an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to revise its Agency NEPA Procedures on January 3, 2018. The Forest Service is currently preparing a proposed rule which it intends to publish later this summer.

*Question 2. Ms. Christiansen, you note in your remarks progress you are making in improving the health and resiliency of our Forest System and the fact that this is also resulting in additional domestic timber production. Knowing that my home builders are facing historically high lumber prices, I wonder what more we might be able to do to help meet our Nation's housing demands while also improving the health of our Forest System?*

Answer. We are aggressively working to bring as much timber volume to market as possible. Knowing we need to take advantage of the high demand for timber will help us achieve our overall forest management goals.

Much of our land treatment needs involve areas where we cannot recover the costs associated with timber, so the more we can integrate land treatment needs with places that we can recover the cost of a timber sale, the more we can accomplish to improve forest health and take advantage of current timber market conditions.

Through better planning under our Environmental Analysis—Decision Making change efforts, we hope to see this integration increase over time. Partnerships, primarily through the Good Neighbor Authority and stewardship programs, allow us the opportunity to treat more acres, which will lead to more timber volume being sold.

*2A. Does the Forest Service coordinate with the Department of the Interior and Department of Energy to enhance resiliency and reliability by ensuring utility rights of ways on Federal lands are properly managed, particularly in those areas likely to be affected by wildfires?*

Answer: Yes, we have and will continue to coordinate with the Department of the Interior to enhance the resiliency and reliability of utility services.

We meet monthly with Bureau of Land Management to discuss various topics related to land access and use, including developing and updating regulations, policies and training to ensure effective, collaborative implementation of the vegetation management provisions. Also, the joint Forest Service-Bureau of Land Management National Lands for Line Officers training has developed a training module to specifically address improved cooperation between the agencies and utilities in the development and approval of maintenance and vegetation management plans.

*2B. With respect to improving electric reliability coordination between the Department of the Interior and Department of Energy, would you consider developing a Memorandum of Understanding between the departments to better protect assets most likely to be affected by fires on Federal lands?*

Answer. Yes. Collaboratively developing a Memorandum of Understanding between the departments to better protect assets most likely to be affected by fires on Federal lands may be very helpful for prioritizing work, aligning processes, and sharing resources for this task.

*Question 3. Please provide the Subcommittee with a summary of the plans you have received from each Region on how they plan to implement the new authorities provided to the Forest Service in the 2018 Omnibus.*

Answer. The responses to the Chief's direction to develop regional strategies were submitted to the Washington Office on June 15. These strategies are in review and summaries are being compiled. Once this process has been completed and the actions provided by the regions are understood and complete, a report will be prepared.

*3A. Now that each plan has been received, how will they be implemented by the region?*

Answer. Each region will implement their own actions as they have described in the plans. At the headquarters level, we will be monitoring the progress made with each action to ensure that actions are productive.

*3B. Are there places where the new 2018 Omnibus authorities are already being implemented?*

Answer. Actions are already underway. The new Categorical Exclusion is being implemented, and work has begun on the identification of locations to implement 20-year stewardship contracts and agreements. A stakeholder meeting was held to listen to the concerns and ideas from our partners. From this meeting the Agency now can develop a program that will meet our needs as well as the partners involved.

*3C. How will you ensure that the best ideas and practices from each Region are being shared and implemented across the Regions?*

Answer. Monthly calls with the regions are held at various levels to ensure that issues are addressed, ideas are exchanged and metrics are being met. If there are barriers that can be dealt with immediately they are dealt with, or at least identified for further action. If an action needs to be raised to the next level, it is brought forward for resolution.

*Question 4. Budgetary uncertainty caused by fire borrowing has been a common reason given for shortfalls in the Forest Service's ability to meet its goals in everything from timber sales to trail maintenance. With a fire borrowing fix passed and additional funds provided by Congress for wildfire suppression, for the first time in a long time the Forest Service is in a more stable financial position.*

*4A. Other than funding, what is the single greatest challenge that limits the ability of the Forest Service to achieve its active management goals? As Chief, how do you plan to lead the Agency from the inside to overcome that challenge?*

Answer. Accomplishing environmental review and delivering forest products in an efficient manner is still a challenge within the Agency. Our current efforts with Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) and our Forest Products Modernization initiatives (FPM) are alleviating that challenge. Both efforts are designed to evaluate the way we have done business in the past to better inform how we operate in the future. We plan to address challenges through improved use of technology, increased training, changes to policy, and addressing our overall agency culture as it pertains to change.

*4B. What can Congress do from the outside to help you?*

Answer: Congress has provided many new authorities and processes for the environmental analysis process to help our management. The Agency is focused on using and learning from the use of the new authorities.

*Question 5. The Plumas National Forest recently completed a CE for a timber sale in 90 days from start to finish. I understand the forest has a goal of completing its next CE in less than 90 days.*

*5A. A critical aspect of increasing the pace of forest management is increasing the pace of the preceding environmental analysis. How do you plan to ensure the Regions increase the pace of their environmental analysis and ensure proactive utilization of CEs where they are available?*

Answer. The Forest Service is undertaking a number of activities to implement existing categorical exclusions and the new authorities in the 2018 Omnibus bill.

The Washington Office has provided guidance to the regions on the scope of the wildfire resilience categorical exclusion, and, in turn, the regions are developing plans outlining how they intend to use this new authority.

The regional responses to the Chief's direction to develop regional strategies were submitted to the Washington Office on June 15. These strategies are in review and summaries are being compiled. Once this process has been completed and the actions provided by the regions are understood and complete, a report will be prepared.

*5B. What are you doing to ensure land managers on the ground have the training and tools they need and feel empowered to accelerate their own environmental review processes?*

Answer. The Agency is implementing a national NEPA training program to provide land managers in the field with a common understanding of what is required to comply with our governing laws, as well as tools to minimize the time needed to conduct competent environmental analysis. All levels of our agency from the Washington Office to the ranger district are involved in this effort, and leadership at every level is fully engaged to ensure success.

*Question 6. You've stated that improved management of our forests has as much to do with where we treat as it does with how many acres we treat.*

*6A. How to you plan to utilize metrics within the Agency to ensure that the Forest Service's limited resources are being directed to those landscapes where they will have the greatest efficacy?*

Answer. Forests manage their activities and prioritize work to ensure they are treating the highest priority areas first. Spatial reporting systems are in place to show where treatments are occurring. This spatial reporting provides us information for regional and national program managers to continue to guide the decisions on where targets and funding are allocated. In addition to our spatial reporting systems, we will use advanced science and new mapping and decision tools to locate treatments where they can do the most good, thereby protecting communities, watersheds, and economies where the risks are greatest. Through partnerships, we can produce more outcomes at a meaningful scale, such as supporting rural economies, reducing fire risk, and improving forest conditions.

*6B. Community resilience as well as forest resilience can be supported by a robust forest products industry. Do you believe that ensuring a sustainable supply of timber to support a local forest products industrial base is an important factor in the consideration of forest management project design and location?*

Answer. A robust local forest products industry is paramount to our success in managing resilient forests. We would not be able to accomplish much on our national forests without outlets for the materials created from our treatments. By removing products that have a value, we are able to fund other projects that otherwise would not be completed. Goals of the Forest Service are to find ways to expand or attract markets to areas and find ways to create new products from unused materials. It is our mission to find ways to do these things where long-term stability is a part of the equation.

*Question 7. Can you speak to the importance of mechanical thinning and other similar fuels reduction techniques as it relates to wildfire prevention? How do you plan to leverage revenue generated by market driven treatments, like timber sales, to provide additional resources to the Agency that can then be reinvested into additional forest management?*

Answer. The importance of mechanical thinning and fuel reduction treatments include reducing long-term fire risk to communities, fire intensity, fire suppression costs, and risk of wildfire damage to natural resources and infrastructure.

Revenue generated from timber sales will be used according to the Knutson-Vandenberg Act of 1930, which authorizes the Secretary to require timber sale purchasers to make deposits to cover the cost of reforestation and related work within timber sale boundaries. We have recently expanded the use of the Knutson-Vandenberg receipts outside the sale area boundary. This will have a big impact on how many acres we can treat. In addition, appropriated funds and partnership funds will be invested into additional forest management.

*Question 8. Your testimony notes that your treatments are becoming more efficient through the use of designation by prescription and updated technologies in the field.*

*8A. Can you explain to the Subcommittee the process of designation by prescription and the other technologies that are being made available in the field?*

Answer. Designation by Prescription is a process where the prescription for treatment of a stand of timber is given to the sale contractor to implement versus the traditional method of having a marking crew go out and identify which trees are to be cut. This cuts out the need for having a marking crew work through the stand and saves money from things like not having to use paint to mark the trees. As the logger cuts the stands, the sale administrators evaluate the harvest selections being made and work with the cutters to ensure the prescription is being understood correctly. Technologies can help with this. For example, virtual boundaries can be loaded into a computer in the cab of the harvester so the logger knows where the sale area stops or areas that need special attention.

*8B. How do these new approaches and technologies increase efficiency?*

Answer. These new approaches will allow the Forest Service to prepare more areas for treatment in faster times since the presale crews do not have to spend as much time on a timber sale. New technologies will also allow us to more efficiently account for the products that are removed.

*8C. Are they being fully utilized across the forests and regions? If not, what is your plan to expand their use?*

Answer. Some new methods and technologies are available and used nationwide. The Forest Service is ensuring that all forests have access to the technologies available. We are striving to have all timber sale activities be digital this year. Regions or forests that need assistance or equipment have been given the opportunity to reach out to the national headquarters for assistance. Some technologies are new to the Agency or new to the forest products industry. These projects are undergoing testing at certain locations to provide the opportunity for us to understand how best to use it on the National Forest System. As these lessons are learned they are being shared with other forests for their implementation.

*Question 9. Can you elaborate on how new drone technologies are being used to support the Forest Service's land management and wildland firefighting mission? How does the Forest Service plan to expand drone operations in the future?*

Answer. In 2017, the Forest Service conducted over 60 Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) missions. Approximately 40 percent were non-fire related and included aerial survey of an archeology site and post fire flood damage assessment in a Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation area.

UAS missions were conducted in six of the nine regions. Fire missions were conducted to collect tactical data and information to support tactical decision making. All missions were conducted using Bureau of Land Management UAS and/or personnel.

The Forest Service has been partnering with state and Federal agencies, such as NASA and Department of Homeland Security, to integrate UAS operations and leverage efficiencies. Results of these collective efforts will be used to finalize the National UAS Operations Plan which addresses all aspects of UAS including acquisition, training, operations, reporting, data collection, and data management. The Forest Service will continue to conduct additional missions to evaluate UAS for effectiveness in post-fire rehabilitation, restoration efforts, surveying archeology sites, and additional structure inspections.

In addition, a Request for Information was published on Federal Business Opportunities ([www.FedBizOpps.gov](http://www.FedBizOpps.gov)) for a draft Forest Service Call When Needed UAS contract. This allowed private industry to weigh in on contract language that ultimately helps produce a contract that is fair, competitive, and relevant to the UAS community. Once specifications are finalized, then the UAS Call When Needed solicitation will be posted to Fedbizops for vendors to bid on.

*Question 10. Are there interagency efficiencies and changes to procedures, like streamlining consultations with the Fish and Wildlife Service, that you think could be helpful to increasing pace and scale? If so, what are your plans to pursue those opportunities?*

Answer. For nearly four decades, the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Forest Service have employed multiple approaches to achieve more efficient and effective consultations under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA, 16 U.S.C. 1531). The approaches have included early interagency cooperation, national and regional streamlining consultation agreements, the use of programmatic and batched consultations, and interagency agreements that provide Forest Service biologists to the NMFS and FWS to help prepare biological opinions and letters of concurrence.

The Forest Service recently completed an evaluation of the potential opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how we conduct ESA consultations, including possible, collaborative ventures with NMFS and FWS.

The Report recommended three opportunities that the Forest Service explore, in cooperation with the Services:

- a. Increase interagency and partner cooperation on recovery of listed species. Coordinating at the national, regional, and local levels to determine relative priorities and needs to improve the conservation and recovery of listed species, including increased leveraging of each agencies' resources in concert with the state fish and wildlife management agencies and tribal governments. Reviewing and updating the aforementioned 2000 Memorandum of Agreement with the parties to better address the contemporary challenges and issues associated with the conservation and management of threatened and endangered species on the Federal public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service.
- b. Assist reviewing agencies with completion of priority consultation backlog. Working with the FWS and NMFS to evaluate where possible consultation backlogs may exist, based upon Forest Service management priorities and the listed species and/or critical habitats that may be most prevalent, affected by, or relevant to their land and resource management plans. Where feasible, collaborating with FWS and NMFS to expand upon existing and/or develop new programmatic section 7(a)(2) consultation agreements for regularly occurring, ongoing actions or section 7(a)(1) conservation programs at the landscape level consistent with the conservation and recovery needs of the species.
- c. Increase long-term Forest Service authorities. Working with FWS, NMFS and their respective Departments to seek their counsel on increasing the Forest Service's regulatory authorities, most notably, for mutually agreed upon projects or programs, allowing the Agency to make "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determinations without the written concurrence from the FWS or NMFS, especially for projects designed to improve forest conditions and conserve threatened and endangered species and/or their critical habitats.

The Forest Service has shared the report's recommendations with both the FWS and NMFS, receiving complementary and favorable feedback from both agencies. The FWS has offered to work closely with the Forest Service on exploring how we might collaborate toward realizing some of the Task Force's recommendations.

Presently, the Forest Service is developing operational plans and staffing proposals to implement the priority recommendations from the report, and, entering into preliminary conversations with the Bureau of Land Management regarding the 2000 Memorandum of Agreement. The Forest Service believes that these efforts offer a great deal of promise to promote procedural efficiencies with section 7 consultation that will contribute to both increasing the pace and scale of the important forest health-related work on NFS lands, while improving the effectiveness of conservation outcomes for listed species.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. Young**

*Question 1. Under the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA), the Service is required to offer 450 million board feet of timber to the timber industry each year. The former Alaska state forester freely acknowledged that there was no way for the U.S. Forest Service to have their legally required timber sales while also following the current forest management plan, which includes a transition to young-growth only timber harvest. How will the Service under your guidance work to fulfill their required timber sale quota?*

**Answer.** The Forest Service is committed to ensuring a continuous and reliable supply of timber to maintain the viability of Southeast Alaska's timber industry during the transition and ensuing years. The Forest Service and timber industry face significant challenges, some of which are unique to Alaska, including higher costs of labor; sparsely developed infrastructure, including roads and timber processing facilities; transportation costs from Alaska to the contiguous 48 states; and variable and unpredictable market conditions. Current initiatives to increase timber sales include:

- *Landscape Level Assessments (LLA):* These are large-scale planning efforts emphasizing collaboration through extensive public involvement to determine types and locations of activities over the course of 10–15 years. It is a high priority for the Tongass National Forest to ensure a continued supply of timber. LLAs involve a broad array of community and timber industry

representatives. Once the following two collaborative, large-scale EISs are approved, the Region will for the first time in a long while have sufficient inventory of approved NEPA projects to meet timber sale commitments for several years—giving industry and communities space to continue inventory, investments, and dialogue associated with transition:

- Prince of Wales LLA: 1.8 million acres; first timber sales in FY 2019
- Central Tongass LLA: 1.4 million acres; first timber sales in FY 2020
- *Good Neighbor Authority*: A Master Good Neighbor Agreement is in place with the state of Alaska. The \$2.6 million, 30 MMBF Kosciusko sale was recently implemented. The Vallenar young-growth project, encompassing an estimated 4.6 MMBF is currently in development.
- *All Landowners Group*: Southeast landowners (State of Alaska, Sealaska Corporation, Alaska Mental Health Trust, et al.) meet regularly to coordinate operations, find efficiencies, and share infrastructure to support timber and other resource management.
- *Tongass-wide young-growth study*: This ongoing, long-term project is enhancing knowledge of silvicultural practices including young-growth management.
- *Southeast Alaska Wood Quality Study*: This study will determine types of commercial products that can be produced from young growth.
- *Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT) Land Exchange*: The Alaska Mental Health land exchange is still moving forward. The Appraisal has taken longer than anticipated. We hope to complete the first phase before the end of June. The AMHT can make approximately 100 MMBF of timber available to local mills as early as 2018. The exchange is a key component for retaining existing timber infrastructure in SE Alaska. Phase II of the exchange will be complete by May 5, 2019 and provide additional volume to local operators.

*Question 2. According to the Alaska Forest Association, it takes approximately 90 years for a timber stand in the Tongass to reach harvestable size. Would you be willing to scrap the current plan to transition to young growth only and work to create a new plan that will not kill off what is left of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska?*

Answer. The Forest Service was directed to facilitate the transition of the Tongass forest management program to predominantly young-growth management while maintaining a viable timber industry in Southeast Alaska and facilitating renewable energy management. The Record of Decision for the amendment to the Tongass Forest Plan to accelerate the transition to young-growth became effective on January 8, 2017. The Plan amendment was developed with comprehensive stakeholder engagement and is based on the unanimous recommendations of the Tongass Advisory Committee.

We are committed to investing in timber management and associated infrastructure needed to sustain the current industry and prepare for expansion of the young-growth program. The Alaska Region is implementing a multi-faceted strategy to facilitate the transition while ensuring the continued viability of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska. We will continue to prepare old-growth “bridge” timber sales until the majority of the program can be offered in young-growth sales.

In 2018 we plan to complete approximately 11,500 acres of young growth and 20,000 acres of old growth, which will complete the inventory. We will review the results of the timber inventory to determine whether amendments to the Tongass Forest Plan are necessary.

*Question 3. The Roadless Rule violates authorities granted to Alaska through ANILCA, and when coupled with the Tongass Transition Plan, it decimates the already fragile timber industry. If we can get Alaska an exemption, will you ensure the Forest Service employees do not stand in the way of responsible resource development in the Tongass and Chugach Forests?*

Answer. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Alaska Governor Bill Walker reached agreement to pursue a state-specific roadless rule to address access concerns on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. The USDA Forest Service has convened the resources and personnel to move forward in support of this agreement. The Forest Service will work closely with the state of Alaska to develop a collaborative process that allows all stakeholders an opportunity to inform the development of this local rule. This agreement follows previous state-specific rulemaking in Colorado and Idaho.

*Question 4. I'm happy that a solution has been found for the Hammer cabin and other family owned cabins within the Tongass, ensuring that they can be transferred to an immediate family member. As far as I'm aware there is nothing in writing to express this new policy. Can you give a timeline for when a written policy will be available?*

Answer. We anticipate having the regional supplement amended by the end of the calendar year.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. Tipton**

*Question 1. I am hearing from my home builders about the historically high lumber markets, how it's affecting housing affordability, and the need for more domestically produced timber both now and in the years to come. It seems to me that this represents a potential win-win if we can take steps to better manage our Forest System and produce additional timber domestically to help meet our Nation's housing demand. What, in your opinion, are the biggest impediments to increasing domestic production of timber off Federal lands? What can we be doing to help you navigate those challenges?*

Answer. The biggest impediment is that we are struggling to meet the increase in demand for timber volume to be sold with our limited capacity. To address this challenge, we are increasing the use of partners through the Good Neighbor and stewardship authorities, and we are implementing efficiencies in our forest products delivery system through modernizing procedures and technologies.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. LaMalfa**

*Question 1. I would like to ask about the vegetation management provision included in the most recent Omnibus package. Congress passed this bill with bipartisan support because I believe we can all agree on the dangers associated with failure to safely maintain transmission rights of way. Can you tell me what the Forest Service has done, and plans to do to implement the law's directives?*

*1A. What level of engagement are you having with the utility companies who own the lines? Are you actively coordinating with them?*

Answer. We communicated to our field staff the maintenance and vegetation management requirements within the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 and outlined steps ahead for implementing those provisions. This included: creating a standard template for powerline maintenance and vegetation management plans that conforms with our Memorandum of Understanding with the Edison Electric Institute; simplifying environmental reviews for plan approvals through categorical exclusions; developing energy-focused training that addresses maintenance and vegetation management; and publishing regulations to formally implement the provisions.

The Forest Service meets twice yearly with the Western Utilities Group. At the most recent meeting in May, we outlined agency requirements under the Appropriations Act and asked for utilities participation in creating training and guidance to educate and inform our staffs on cooperative development of maintenance and vegetation management plans. We had a similar meeting with members of the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association in April. We will be re-engaging with representatives for both groups, as well as the Edison Electric Institute in the coming weeks to further discuss their direct assistance to the Agency.

*1B. What about coordination with BLM? Can you expand on how your agency is working with them to ensure consistent implementation?*

Answer. We meet monthly with Bureau of Land Management to discuss various topics related to land access and use, including developing and updating regulations, policies and training to ensure effective, collaborative implementation of the vegetation management provisions. Also, the joint Forest Service-Bureau of Land Management National Lands for Line Officers training has developed a training module to specifically address improved cooperation between the agencies and utilities in the development and approval of maintenance and vegetation management plans.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. Westerman**

*Question 1. The Forest Service has deployed its agency-wide Stand Up for Each Other training. This is an important part of confronting a culture of sexual misconduct; however, training is not enough to change the culture. What sorts of*



*accountability measures is the Forest Service implementing? What is the Forest Service doing to identify and discipline perpetrators of sexual misconduct and assault?*

Answer. The Forest Service investigates all reported incidents of sexual harassment and transmits all reported incidents of sexual assault to independent law enforcement. In August 2016, the Forest Service implemented an enhanced nationwide anti-harassment policy and program. The policy provides an additional avenue to report harassment that ensures that every case is looked into by a third party. The policy requires managers to report known allegations within specific time frames and that every allegation is addressed and appropriate action taken. All allegations of sexual harassment or misconduct are handled by a credentialed misconduct investigator.

To determine disciplinary approaches, the Forest Service follows applicable law, rules, regulations, and policy including USDA's Guide for Disciplinary Penalties dated June 29, 1994. The guide discusses the types of misconduct and associated penalties for first and subsequent offenses. The guide also provides a framework for evaluating each case based on pertinent aggravating or mitigating factors to determine the appropriate penalty, including termination of employment, for each type of misconduct.

Earlier this year, the Forest Service drafted a new code and commitment for all Forest Service employees establishing behavioral standards anchored in agency core values (i.e., service, interdependence, diversity, safety and conservation). The code establishes mutual expectations of accountability to each other.

The Forest Service is also implementing a new performance management metric on work environment for supervisors. Finally, the Forest Service is awaiting final guidance from the Office of Personnel Management on Executive Order 13839, which will streamline removal procedures for poor and unacceptable employees.

*Question 2. What is the Forest Service doing to ensure that people who make claims of sexual assault, misconduct, or gender discrimination are taken seriously? How is the Forest Service ensuring that their claims are being processed and addressed in a timely fashion?*

Answer. The Forest Service investigates all reported incidents of sexual harassment and reports all reported incidents of sexual assault to independent law enforcement. Employees who raise gender discrimination claims or any claim covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are immediately referred to the Equal Employment Opportunity complaint process, which is administered by the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.

In November of 2017, the Forest Service launched the Harassment Reporting Center, a new avenue for employees that provides a single, dedicated resource for reporting all forms of harassment. Employees can reach a Harassment Reporting Center representative 7 days a week. The center is operated by skilled and trained contracted individuals. The Forest Service is expanding use of contract and other Federal investigators for sexual misconduct investigations. The Forest Service is currently utilizing independent contract investigators for all allegations of sexual harassment within the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) and will be working to increase the use of contract investigators nationally.

The Harassment Reporting Center is a new service for employees that provides a single, dedicated resource for reporting all forms of harassment. Employees can reach a Harassment Reporting Center Representative 7 days a week by calling the center, toll free. The center is operated by skilled and extensively trained contracted individuals. All calls are processed within 1 day for assault, or 2 days for other types of bullying or harassment.

*Question 3. How many acres of Forest Service Land are at high or very high risk of wildfire currently?*

Answer. The most current Wildfire Hazard Potential map, completed in 2014, indicates there are 51 million acres of National Forest Systems lands that have a relative high or very high potential for a large wildfire that would be difficult for suppression resources to contain. The map is being updated this year with more recent data and techniques. <https://www.firelab.org/project/wildfire-hazard-potential>.

*Question 4. In 2017, how many acres did the forest service treat for wildfire? With the new authorities provided by Congress, how many acres is the forest service planning on treating this year, in 2019, and beyond? Is this pace of treatment enough to keep pace with the current rate at which acreage is being deemed high or very high risk of wildfire?*

Answer. In FY 2017, the Forest Service reported 2,757,000 acres of hazardous fuels treatment. The FY 2018 target for the same measure is 3,000,000 acres. We believe we are on track to meet this target. The proposed target for FY 2019 is 3,355,000 acres.

The dynamic nature of change on the landscape over time makes the second part of the question more difficult to answer. Some initial analysis has indicated that 4 to 8 million acres of the high risk landscape needs to be treated each year to significantly mitigate wildfire risk. This considers the need for multiple treatments to mitigate risk in some locations and the durability of the treatments when completed. We are currently working on an analysis that also considers a more refined assessment of conditions, a consideration of management operability, strategic planning across scales, and the needs and capabilities of our neighbors and partners. We expect to gain a refined understanding of the scope of the problem.

*Question 5. What is the forest service leadership doing to ensure that our Nation's foresters use every new and existing authority to aggressively treat our forests? What additional tools would let the Forest Service treat more acreage more aggressively?*

Answer. Forest Service leadership has been actively working with the regions to introduce the new authorities to field staff. The regions have developed action plans that describe what steps will be immediately taken to implement the authorities and how they will continue to expand their use into the future. We look forward to continuing work with Congress on changes to current tools that would provide us additional options to meet our challenges.

*Question 6. In the House version of the Farm Bill, H.R. 2, I submitted and passed an amendment calling for the Forest Service to report yearly on the specific steps taken to aggressively treat wildfire. While this measure has not yet passed, it is my belief that seeing a matrix of actions taken, acres treated, and dollars spent will be critical to explaining to the American people about our progress in the battle to reverse this neglect. Will the Forest Service commit to complete transparency in this process, and will you commit to reporting a yearly matrix of active management numbers to Congress?*

Answer. Yes, the Forest Service is committed to being transparent in all of the actions to aggressively reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve our forest conditions. We look forward to working with you on this reporting matrix if this bill is passed.

*Question 7. The Forest Service's budget justification proposes utilizing \$390 million dollars for hazardous fuels reduction. In 2017, the Forest Service treated just over 2.75 million acres of at-risk land. This roughly translates to a treatment cost of \$142 dollars per acre treated. A 3,000-acre parcel—the maximum allowed by the new fire suppression categorical exclusion authorized in the Omnibus—would cost nearly half a million dollars to treat. Why is that so expensive?*

Answer. The calculation (above) of average treatment costs does not consider the impact of some costs such as fixed costs and overhead expenses, nor does it consider all contributions such as partnerships and other budget lines that contribute to integrated accomplishments. The marginal cost of hazardous fuels treatments has a very large range from as low as \$25 per acre for a stand-alone prescribed burn in some parts of the Southeast to over \$3,500 per acre for mechanical treatment in a complex Wildland Urban Interface area like Lake Tahoe. So, the marginal cost of your hypothetical 3,000 acre treatment could be as low as \$75,000 or as high as \$11 million.

Treatment costs are influenced by treatment method, planning costs, complexity, region, season, risk, availability of resources or contractors, terms and duration of the contract, and many other factors.

*Question 8. With the new, 20-year stewardship contracting ceiling, what is the Forest Service doing to attract new mill infrastructure, and increase private collaboration on our Nation's forests?*

Answer. The Forest Service is working to identify areas where available resources, infrastructure availability and community interest overlap where we can launch 20-year stewardship contracts. At the same time we will be developing the contracting requirements necessary to protect the resources, and the government's interests, as part of our commitment to see the project be a success. Once we have projects identified, we will begin the implementation at a pace that will allow the programs to succeed.

*Question 9. What is the long-term outlook for domestic timber production on our national forests, and what is the Forest Service doing to increase this number, especially in the face of record-high lumber prices?*

Answer. We have set national targets for the next 5 years and are working to develop regional strategies to support those accomplishments. Our goal is to increase our volume sold from 3.4 billion board feet (bbf) to 4.0 bbf by the year 2020. Along with these management targets, our researchers are working to identify the areas across the country that show the potential for the highest impact to meet our strategic goals of harvesting timber while reducing hazardous fuel loads.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. Bergman**

*Question 1. The 2018 Omnibus made a big change in how wildfire funding is apportioned. In the past, we heard stories of how Federal land management agencies had to “rob Peter to pay Paul” in order to fund wildfire funding and how that doing so created uncertainty for non-fire programs, including forest and wildland resiliency. With the new funding strategy in effect in 2020, how is the Forest Service preparing and how will it capitalize on new program funding certainty? Can you please tell us how the Forest Service will use these new tools and resources to increase much needed active forest management and fuel reduction work?*

Answer. The new funding strategy is part of a multi-faceted approach. Parts of the new approach include:

- Forest Products Modernization to deliver forest products more efficiently,
- Improvements to Environmental Analysis and Decision Making to comply with environmental legislation and regulations more efficiently and effectively capture economies of scale,
- Improved analysis of wildfire risk and prioritization of active vegetation management to optimize investments and strategic placement of treatments,
- Better coordination with neighbors and partners to leverage cross-boundary investments and actions to create more change on the landscape over time, and
- More stability in funding for the resource management programs.

*Question 2. Chief Christiansen, as you stated in your testimony, the “Fire Funding Fix” doesn’t kick in until FY 2020. Do you expect to borrow funds for this year and if so how much would you estimate?*

Answer. Early indicators predict another active fire year and total Forest Service costs for the FY 2018 fire season are predicted to fall between \$1.091 billion and \$1.959 billion. Between the FY 2018 appropriation and prior year funding recovered from states, almost \$1.897 billion is available for fire suppression. Should the cost of the fire year approach the upper end of predicted costs, fire transfer would be necessary for any amount over the available funds.

*Question 3. How is the Forest Service planning for this contingency and what are you doing to ensure that impacts on critical forest management activities are minimized?*

Answer. The Forest Service has already initiated internal discussions about the Agency’s fire transfer strategy should suppression costs for the fire year exceed available funding, which is \$1.897 billion. The strategy is not yet complete; however, the stated goal is to minimize disruption to land management activities. In the past, this has largely been accomplished through the use of both Permanent and Trust accounts.

#### **Questions Submitted by Rep. McEachin**

*Question 1. What percentage of planned timber projects are affected by litigation? Of those, in what percentage does the court ultimately stop the project from moving forward?*

Answer. From FY 2012 to date, the Forest Service has approved 5,105 forest products projects, of which 301, or about 17 percent, have been litigated.

It is difficult to know how many of the projects were unable to “ultimately” move forward for several reasons. For example, a court may grant a preliminary injunction halting the project while the case proceeds, after which the case may be settled, the project decision may be withdrawn by the Forest Service, or the injunction may be lifted. Additionally, many of our cases are brought under the National Environmental Policy Act, the remedy for which is a new NEPA document. This means that

a project associated with a lost NEPA case may still be able to move forward after a new NEPA document is completed.

*Question 2. Do timber companies, small businesses or and other non-environmental groups ever sue the forest service? If we got rid of litigation wouldn't that prevent all people from ensuring that projects were lawful?*

Answer. The Forest Service is often sued by non-environmental organizations. The breakdown of plaintiffs since 2012 is, roughly, as follows:

- Environmental/Conservation: 196
- Government/Tribe/State/Local: 22
- Private Parties/Individuals: 33
- Business/Trade Organizations: 36

In order to have standing to sue, all plaintiffs, including governmental and business organizations, must have suffered a distinct injury as a result of the defendant's conduct. As such, the rights asserted by the governmental and business organizations are similar to those of the environmental non-profits' litigation. While environmental non-profits generally seek to stop Forest Service actions and projects, governmental and business organizations seek to halt projects as well as affirmatively recognize rights.

State, local, and tribal governments as well as business organizations sue to secure their ability to conduct activities on or adjacent to National Forest System lands. They may also voluntarily join lawsuits as "intervenor"—either in support of, or adverse to, the Forest Service. For example:

- Five tribes sued the Forest Service in response to the planning associated with Presidential Proclamation Modifying the Bears Ears National Monument, signed in 2017. In their argument that the Proclamation and its implementation was unlawful, the tribes brought "separation of powers" claims under the U.S. Constitution and "failure to act" claims under the Administrative Procedure Act. *Hopi v. Trump et al.*, (17–2590, D. D.C.).
- Utah State Governor Herbert sued on behalf of the state, seeking that the Utah portions of the Great Basin Record of Decision (amending land use plans to protect the sage-grouse) be remanded. The state claimed that the decision disregarded "multiple use and sustained yield—and impose contradictory, and often unnecessary, restrictions on all activities in or near speculative habitat." *Herbert et al. v. Jewell*, (16–0101, D. Utah).
- In 2012, the National Ski Area Association sued the Forest Service over recognition of water rights on NFS lands that ski resorts were operating through special use permits. *National Ski Areas Association, Inc. v. United States Forest Service, et al.*, (No. 12–48, D. Colo.).

*Question 3. What is the Forest Service doing to analyze how it's fire suppression methods and alternative methods will affect long-term health of the forest and the well-being of nearby communities?*

Answer. In conjunction with partners, communities and cooperating agencies, the guidance for the implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Policy clearly states that Wildland fire analysis will carefully consider the long-term benefits in relation to risks both in the short and long term. Together we understand that fire is a critical natural process, which is integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. Response to wildland fire is based on an assessment of ecological, social and legal consequences. These assessments are informed by the circumstances under which a fire occurs, the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources that could be protected, and property values to be protected.

The USDA Forest Service analyzes the use of fire suppression methods in pre-identifying appropriate response to unplanned wildland fire ignitions as part of the Forest Planning process for each national forest. This process identifies where it will be necessary to suppress unplanned ignitions to protect values which could be at risk. The process also identifies areas where unplanned ignitions could be used to improve the long-term health of the forest. The result is guidance for forest managers to utilize unplanned ignitions to move toward the creation of fire resilient landscapes, which are key to long-term health of the forest. Healthy forests are those where fire can be managed effectively given an area's history of vegetative treatments and prior fire activity. Healthy forests provide conditions where communities can be better protected.

Firefighter and public safety is our first priority. The operational roles of the USDA Forest Service as partners in the wildland urban interface are wildland fire-fighting, hazardous fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance.

*Question 4. It is my understanding that the Forest Service has created a new "Harassment Reporting Center," which includes a hotline to receive complaints of harassment. How does the center work; how many complaints has the center received; what is the disposition of the cases; and how many of the cases involve any allegation of retaliation? Has there been an uptick in reports to the Center since recent media coverage of harassment issues at the Forest Service on PBS?*

Answer. The Harassment Reporting Center is operated by skilled, highly-trained contractors called Reporting Center Representatives. The Harassment Reporting Center's primary role is to intake harassment allegations, but they are able to answer some general questions about our policy and provide contact information. The Harassment Reporting Center maintains confidentiality and cannot release any information about a case, or the status of a case.

The Harassment Assessment and Review Team (HART) is a specialized team of inquiry officials authorized to conduct inquiries on most harassment allegations. An inquiry is either conducted by a supervisor/manager or by a HART inquiry official. An investigation is conducted by a credentialed misconduct investigator and involves statements taken under oath. The intent of both is to gather all the facts of the incident to determine if harassment or misconduct can be proven.

The anti-harassment procedures allow management to address employee allegations of harassment and take immediate and appropriate corrective action, including the use of disciplinary actions, to eliminate harassing conduct regardless of whether the conduct violated the law. The goal of anti-harassment policy and procedures is to address harassing conduct at the earliest possible stage.

Between September 1, 2016 and June 30, 2018, there were 1,594 cases of harassment reported. A total of 946 cases have been closed and of those closed cases, 202 (21.4 percent) substantiated misconduct. A total of 213 disciplinary actions have been issued for the cases where misconduct was substantiated (there were a few cases where misconduct, not related to any type of harassment, was found and more than one corrective action sometimes results).

Caseload has been going up due to news stories, Agency outreach and growing awareness of the Harassment Reporting Center, as well as the agency-wide *Stand Up for Each Other* training that has been taken by most employees during the last month.

*Question 5. The Reporting Center is not identical to or part of the EEO process. The EEO process is required by law to identify instances in which discrimination or retaliation have occurred and determine how victims can be made whole. How does the Harassment Reporting Center and the process of investigating complaints established by the Forest Service protect victims' rights and make victims whole if any form of discrimination or retaliation has been found to have occurred? In how many instances has the Forest Service taken corrective action to make victims whole as a result of the findings arising from the Harassment Reporting Center or the investigation of complaints made to the Reporting Center, particularly findings relating to retaliation?*

Answer. Our Harassment Reporting Center allows Forest Service management to address employee allegations of harassment and take immediate and appropriate corrective actions through human resources. These may include disciplinary actions, and eliminating harassing conduct at the earliest possible stage regardless of whether the conduct violated the law.

Employees who raise any claim covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are immediately referred to the Equal Employment Opportunity complaint process, which is administered by the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. In the Federal EEO process, the types of relief will depend upon the discriminatory action and the effect it had on the complainant. The employer also will be required to stop any discriminatory practices and take steps to prevent discrimination in the future. A victim of discrimination also may be able to recover monetary damages, attorney's fees, expert witness fees, and court costs.

If an employee feels they are being retaliated against for participating/cooperating in an investigation, they should contact a management official, Employee Relations or Civil Rights immediately. They may file a new report with the Harassment Reporting Center, or notify a management official, the servicing Employee Relations supervisor or field Civil Rights director, or file an EEO complaint with the USDA

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. All reports of retaliation will be investigated, and proven acts of retaliation will result in disciplinary action.

*Question 6. Do the Forest Service's Human Resources and Civil Rights offices each play a role in the investigation and resolution of complaints that are received by the Harassment Reporting Center? Can you please describe these roles?*

Answer. USFS Civil Rights is responsible for ensuring that the employee knows their Equal Employment Opportunity rights, for contributing to policy development and training initiatives, and for supporting management's role of caring for employee's welfare and safety during the process. USFS Civil Rights is not involved in processing, investigating or evaluating cases that arise during the anti-harassment process for misconduct. That is an exclusive function of Human Resources Management.

Human Resources Management is responsible for overseeing the processing, investigating or evaluating of anti-harassment cases. The harassment inquiry process investigates all claims of harassment and misconduct that do not rise to the level of being considered criminal acts (e.g., physical assault) or illegal discrimination (e.g., civil rights claims). Claims of criminal activity are investigated by law enforcement officials and claims of illegal discrimination are handled by the EEO process and both of those are separate and distinct from the Harassment Reporting Center investigation process.

The Harassment Reporting Center process is designed to ensure the care and safety of employees. This is everyone's responsibility, including Human Resources Management and Civil Rights specialists.

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Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you very much. And that fits nicely in with our agenda, because we are now at question time. I will begin.

Chief Christiansen, the Forest Service once generated funds for the Federal Treasury through the sale of excess timber. This not only produced healthy forests, but it also produced vibrant, prosperous economies for the local communities in our mountains. Twenty-five percent of the revenues from Federal timber sales were shared directly with the local governments impacted, with the balance going back to the Treasury that we could then put back into land management.

The Forest Service, over the past several decades, has gone from a net revenue generator to a net revenue consumer. Where did we go wrong and how do we get back to those days?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Mr. Chairman, I absolutely understand the vital importance of these National Forest System lands as a part of a larger landscape inclusive of communities that depend on these lands for their livelihood and rural prosperity. The Forest Service is absolutely committed to getting more work done to keep these communities vibrant.

Managing the lands for forest products is absolutely important for the health and vitality and the products provided, but there are several other income generation that national forestlands provide. The recreation economy from national forests is significant. We are absolutely committed to work with local communities to define what their needs are and to be responsive to those needs and those increased revenues.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Recreation, though, doesn't produce healthy forests. Active forest management produces healthy forests, with the byproduct of revenues generated for the Treasury, for the local communities, as well as for land management. The Forest Service once did that, now it is consuming resources.

Can you give us, in a minute or so, what is your plan to get back to a point where the Forest Service is actively managing our forests

and generating revenues again, both for those local communities and for the Federal Treasury?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. It is on the path that we are on. It is to continue our internal reforms. We are producing faster work with better quality and are modernizing our forest products work and our environmental assessment and decision making.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. The increases in timber harvests are encouraging, but they are still only a fraction of the annual forest growth. They are only a fraction of what we once harvested. How long will it take to get us back to pre-1980 harvest levels where we were actually producing a sustainable forest?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Mr. Chairman, we are on an increased path upward, with the amount of activity to improve forest conditions. We are going to go up by another 15 percent next year is our benchmark and our target, on both our forest health treatments and our—

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. What else do you need from us to get there?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We have gotten some really good tools. We will always work with you, and any tools you give us, we will certainly put them to use. What I am trying to express is we are working on our own internal processes as well. And working in conjunction with Congress, we really appreciate these tools. We are going to put them on the ground as fast as we can.

Let me be clear that I have not asked our folks to stop their work and retool everything, because you know we do plan out 18 months, 24 months in advance. That is why these plans have to be submitted to me by tomorrow from all our regions, to be very transparent on how we are going to implement these tools and what the gains are going to be, and then we will be evaluating those and we will be glad to work with you.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Could you give us a quick progress report on the new authority granted for categorical exclusions from NEPA for forest thinning in the Tahoe Basin that was part of the 2016 WIIN Act?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. I just talked with Regional Forester Moore yesterday. We have gotten a couple good projects in there. One large project that is underway is a great collaborative with lots of community support. We have gotten our tools in order, and they plan to put more in place.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. By the way, I want to give a huge shout-out to Randy Moore, the Region 5 supervisor, as well as Jeff Marsolais, who I think are doing a splendid job there in the Tahoe Basin.

Do you think this authority should be extended system-wide?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We would certainly work with you on that, Congressman, absolutely.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Great. Thank you.

Ms. Hanabusa.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Nine of the largest fire years on record have occurred since 2000. Can you tell us why we have seen such a dramatic increase in the size of fires since that year?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. Congresswoman, I have been in the fire response business for over 35 years, and I will tell you it is

absolutely correct. A very large fire was a thousand acres when I first started. Now, a fire that is 10,000 acres is moderate in size.

It is a number of factors. It is extended drought. It is the conditions of our forests. There are a variety of reasons. We have excluded fire for a hundred years. Many of these landscapes do need some form of fire. We have had less management, as the Congressman has just talked about, for a couple decades.

There are a variety of things, and it is more complicated. We have 44 million homes in what we call the wildland-urban interface. Those homes are important to protect, just as watersheds are, so we have to divert resources to protect these communities. And hotter, dryer, more intense, unfortunately, is what our challenge is in this Nation.

Ms. HANABUSA. You mentioned in your testimony, last year was one of the most devastating wildfire years on record. Tragically, dozens of Americans were killed, including 14 wildland firefighters, who perished protecting lives and property. It was also the most expensive year, costing about \$2.9 billion to suppress the wildfires across the Nation.

It seems like every year, the Forest Service spends more and more and puts more and more firefighters at risk, with multiple fatalities each year. Is there anything Congress can do to reduce the risk to firefighters or reduce the amount the Forest Service spends on firefighting?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congresswoman, I really appreciate that question. That is the work that the entire wildland fire community is looking at.

Based on some principles of the National Wildland Fire Cohesive Strategy, where we know we have to create more resilient landscapes and Congress has given us some additional tools, we have to take those tools and make the absolute commitment it is not business as usual, and get more work done to change the trajectory of many of those landscapes.

It is pretty clear we have to treat at least 20 to 40 percent of a landscape, and that might not all be National Forest System lands, to really have the resiliency we need. Additionally, we work with communities so they can become fire adapted. Many of these communities, we are going to have fire, but we can live with fire.

And then we have to really look at our response. Some fires, with these extreme conditions, we have to really look at our probability of success. This is so we don't put unnecessary risk to these firefighters and just waste expenses. So, that is the 2 percent of the fires that are extreme conditions, and we need to respond with the right conditions when the fuels or the weather moderates, and sometimes all we can do is protect communities or a critical watershed. So, a partnership with Congress and communities would be really helpful. Any additional tools we would really welcome as well.

Ms. HANABUSA. How is climate change affecting the forests' health, and how does climate change contribute to the occurrence of wildfire?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Congresswoman, certainly our extended drought and changing climate are factors, as well as the amount of grown-up fuels on the land, and, again, the human community



intermixes. There are many factors that have added to our complexity. Our scientists have studied that the western fire season is 78 days longer than it was just 15 years ago, so there are changes in our vegetation and our climate factors as well.

Ms. HANABUSA. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Westerman.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Christiansen, I think I mentioned in my opening statement that Chief Tidwell said there were 58 million acres at risk of catastrophic wildfire. I believe that number now is up to 70 million. Is that correct?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, Congressman, we can parse these numbers for a while. There are 80 million that are at moderate to extreme risk and around 50 million at extreme risk and then 11 million that are in the critical path of the wildland-urban interface and critical watersheds. Those are sort of three categories that I talk about.

Mr. WESTERMAN. In those categories, are you prioritizing where you are focusing efforts now? Are you trying to address the 11 million acres initially or are you just looking at it across the full spectrum of the 80 million?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We are getting more precision, because just more acres faster is not a good investment strategy, and we have to look at the critical risk. So, we are getting more fine-tuned with our analytics. Our scientists are really great at helping us look at that transmission of risk and where the most important timber values, watershed values, and human communities are at risk. We are getting more precise.

Mr. WESTERMAN. That is an area I want you to discuss a little bit more. Thank you for the increased efforts that you are putting forth already. I believe you mentioned 10 percent increase in harvest this year and maybe 15 percent next year. So, that takes you from 3 million to 3.3 million, and then from 3.3 million up close to 3.7 million acres.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, I will take your numbers. We actually are going to produce 3.4 this year, and with the goal of reaching 3.7 and then 4.

Mr. WESTERMAN. My numbers are significantly higher than that, if you want to take them. But that was just a quick calculation on where I thought, from your testimony, you would be.

So, if we have 80 million acres at risk and the amount of forestland moving into that high-risk area is increasing at 7 percent per year, then we are looking at somewhere over 5 million acres per year adding to the amount of acreage that is already at risk. So, if we are treating less than 6 percent of the acreage and we are adding 7 percent or more back per year, how do we ever get ahead of the curve? Or at what point do you see us ramping up enough that we are actually reducing the quantity of acreage that is at catastrophic risk?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I lost you on your 7 percent, that you said we are increasing 7 percent per year. I am sorry, is that what you said?

Mr. WESTERMAN. That is my understanding, that there is about 7 percent additional acreages that go into the at-risk category each year. So, the 70 or 80 million that is at risk this year would increase by another 4 to 5 million acres next year.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. I can talk more details about where that 7 percent is. It is variable, because while some wildfires do actually help reduce hazardous fuel, it is not the same every year, but roughly, we are at 3 million acres and we are intending to increase that. So, what I hear you saying is we are still at a net increase in extreme—

Mr. WESTERMAN. And with all the good things you are doing, it looks like the land subject to catastrophic wildfire is going to be gaining ground on you still. So, with the good work you are proposing, I am trying to figure out how to get a little more acceleration into it so that we can get ahead of the curve and start reversing the trend.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. This is where there is some work we are doing, and we would be glad to come in and brief you. We are looking at the trade-offs of where we treat and what the outcomes of those treatments are.

Mr. WESTERMAN. If I can get one last question in and give you time to answer it.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. OK.

Mr. WESTERMAN. On the size and intensity of the wildfires, are you doing anything to put these fires out earlier? I know there are instances where you want to let them burn because it is the right thing to do, but I know there have been cases where the fire could have been put out at a smaller size.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I appreciate that. We are aggressive in our initial attack where we can be successful. And as I said in my opening comments, we are successful 98 percent of the time. The 2 percent that we aren't is because there are extreme conditions that we would be putting firefighters at risk and we have no probability of success.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are cases where we believe we can treat fuels by the natural ignition. But those are the exception, not the rule. We are always looking at improving the way we do initial attack on fires.

And coming from the state side, I have plenty of experience, because I managed and protected somebody else's land. But we have some pretty tough ground in extreme conditions. So, we will work hard to improve our initial attack success rate, but I believe our people are pretty sharp. We do ask them to manage with risk in mind, and no life is worth getting out a fire quicker.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. McEachin.

Mr. MCEACHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Christiansen, thank you for being with us today. In your written testimony, you talk about a safe and healthy workplace environment, so I want to discuss that a little bit today.

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, we have tried to focus on and requested action to address the pervasive culture across the Department of the Interior when it comes to sexual harassment.

In 2016, Denise Rice, an employee in Region 5, testified before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on rampant sexual harassment and discrimination in the Agency. In her testimony, she said, “Zero tolerance is lip service when we know the system is rigged against women for reporting sexual harassment or assault.”

More recently, PBS interviewed 34 current and former Forest Service women spanning 13 states who described a culture of hostility and retaliation.

I can appreciate and I welcome the changes that the Forest Service has implemented to make it easier to report sexual assault and harassment. However, victims will not come forward if retaliation remains so widespread and so feared. What is the Forest Service doing to help the survivors who have already come forward and to stop retaliation throughout the Forest Service?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congressman, for your question. We cannot be successful in achieving our mission unless every employee has a safe and healthy work environment, and we are committed to doing that. And that is getting under the deep parts of our culture and really understanding and making shifts, as well as some structural and programmatic changes.

In November of 2017, we opened a reporting center, where any employee can, 7 days a week, report any form of harassment without the fear of retaliation by having to go through their chain of command. We have put more investigators on, so our processes are more timely.

But more than that, it is about what is under this. Why are folks afraid to report, and what is the retaliation. Since I was appointed Interim Chief, we have developed a Stand Up for Each Other action plan that puts additional resources and actions in place.

Next week, all 30,000 employees will close business for a day, and they will be involved in a day-long session called Stand Up for Each Other. They will go through anti-harassment training that is from our recent broadened and strengthened anti-harassment policy, and we will be rolling out a new code of conduct. And we will be doing some work called Being an Ally, because every person in this Agency needs to stand up and make sure everyone is respected for what they bring and their ideas, even if it is different.

Mr. MCEACHIN. Would you be kind enough to send us those materials so that we can take a look at them?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Absolutely. I would be glad to.

Mr. MCEACHIN. I appreciate it. I am in Cannon 314.

You indicated that you have put more investigators, I guess, into the process. One of the problems with the Forest Service using its own investigators is that nearly half of the employees interviewed “express some level of mistrust in Forest Service’s process for handling sexual harassment and sexual misconduct complaints.”

Given the wide mistrust of the Forest Service’s investigatory process, are you still on track—that is, the Forest Service, not you, ma’am—is the Forest Service still on track to hire outside investigators by March 30, and how is the Agency supporting each region’s efforts to do this?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, sir, absolutely. We are on track. For California, all of our investigators are contract investigators. And

we went further than what the OIG report recommended, and we are just now getting a contract out. So, all sexual harassment cases across the Agency will be investigated by a contract investigator.

Mr. MCEACHIN. Thank you, ma'am.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Pearce.

Mr. PEARCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ms. Christiansen, for being here today. I want to follow up on Mr. Westerman's question on this idea that 2 percent of the fires are not contained and all the others are sort of successful. I think his question was, what is the policy to go in and put the fires out quickly? And you responded that 2 percent are not successful and the rest are.

In 2012, we had two major fires in New Mexico. One was the Whitewater Baldy, 300,000 acres. If you go back through the daily reports of the command post, early, about day 15 or so, they are talking about watching the fire and it is achieving its management objectives. Then the winds got up, as they will occasionally do like 365 days a year in New Mexico, and blew it out of control.

So, is that one of the 2 percent or is that one of the other fires? Is that one of the fires that was controlled, in your recordkeeping? And I am very interested in how you classify these fires.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. If we are unable to suppress a wildfire in less than 10 acres, then we call that an extended attack, so then we are not successful.

Mr. PEARCE. Is that one of the 2 percent or is that one of the—

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, that would be a 2 percent.

Mr. PEARCE. So, you are telling me that only 2 percent of the fires move beyond 10 acres?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. In the number of fires. Now, clearly, there are far more acres in the 2 percent.

Mr. PEARCE. I am just talking about the number, because when I watch in New Mexico, there was another fire running at that same time. It started out to be less than an acre or two, and they had 20 people standing around it for 3 or 4 days. Again, the wind got up, and that is when it burned down 254 buildings and 30,000 acres.

That was the previous administration. I am wondering, do you have the same objective here of letting fire—you had made the mention that there is a need for some form of fire in our forest. The previous administration had a very precise thing that we are going to let fire do its management, achieve its management objectives. So, I guess I am asking, is that same perception still there?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. The Federal Wildland Fire Policy still exists, sir, but I would say how we implement that is what you are asking. Let me just give some quick context.

Mr. PEARCE. I have a couple more questions.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. OK. Yes, there are places where fire is an important tool to reduce the hazardous fuels on the landscape. So, where we can do it—

Mr. PEARCE. But it seems to be that that is a generalized assumption. And when you have a drought of historic proportions, which is going on right now, and when you have the fuel buildups which you have going on right now, and they have existed for the

last 10 or 15 years, then to say that there are places we are going to let fire do its management objectives doesn't make sense, but it looks like what is happening.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Agreed.

Mr. PEARCE. Moving on, you mentioned in your report that in one state you have 50,811 acres, and that you can tell that is a point of pride for the Forest Service. And you mentioned it is 36 projects. Now, keep in mind, if I divide 36 into the 50,000 acres, you come up with about 1,411 acres. Our forests are a million acres plus in New Mexico, and these projects of a thousand acres are never going to get there. You divide a million into a thousand, then you are never going to get it clean, and that is what we face.

Some of the forests in New Mexico are trying to put more wilderness in areas that do not qualify. They are going to cherry stem out all of the nonqualifying factors. Are you aware of these efforts to create more wilderness in New Mexico when the local communities are standing up in arms saying we do not want more wilderness?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I am not precisely aware of those.

Mr. PEARCE. You should take a look at the Cibola, you should take a look at the Gila, and any others.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. OK. I will.

Mr. PEARCE. In Catron County, the Gila, you have the wilderness of about 3 million acres, and then you have the Gila National Forest, another million acres. They have just asked for rocks from the borrow pits to put on the roads, because they have 907 miles of roads through the Forest Service and they bog down completely, because it is just very good soil. It is just clay soil. They are being asked to bring that rock from Arizona at tremendous cost.

Is there any way that a local county can get—I mean, it is not like we are running out of rocks in the Gila. They are in plentiful supply, and we have local agencies that will tell us if we get too deep into the rock supply. Can't we just have some reason from the local Forest Service people and get local rocks instead of Arizona rocks?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Congressman, I don't know the particulars, but I would be glad to work with you. Absolutely.

Mr. PEARCE. I will get you the particulars. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You have been gracious.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Gallego.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Ms. Christiansen, for being here with your wealth of experience, and, of course, some of that experience being from Phoenix, Arizona. I greatly appreciate it. You must be very, very wise in that case, so thank you for being willing to take some questions.

Specifically, being in Arizona and actually serving in the State House, I saw a lot of the effects of our wildfires, especially where our wild areas meet our urban areas. It is usually the most dangerous flashpoints. So, I understand that residential development in areas adjacent to fire-prone forests, what we call the wildland-urban interface or—I am going to say this incorrectly—WUI. Is that right?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. WUI.

Mr. GALLEGO. WUI, thank you. WUI continues to increase.

In 2010, the Forest Service estimated that there were almost 44 million homes, including second homes, in this area. We know that these areas are very attractive to Americans—I hope to be able to afford one of these places myself some day—for the countless reasons that we all know. We know that residing there puts us at significant risk, both the residents and, of course, the first responders, as we saw what happened not too many years ago with our first responders in northern Arizona, and puts additional pressures in terms of firefighting budgets and, in general, just the watersheds, the harm to the watersheds.

What concerns do you, or the Forest Service, I should say, have about these areas that are beyond the borders of the Federal forests? And how can Congress encourage a smarter approach to development in the WUI?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congressman. A really good question. And it is something, quite frankly, that is really important to us. We encourage, while we are trying to create resilient landscapes on the national forests, that the communities also work to create fire-adapted communities. As you know, most of the states oversee, or the local governments, their local zoning and building codes. We work with entities that are willing to work on being fire-wise communities. We do some technical assistance through the state forestry agencies. We partner, because we have to work on both sides of the boundary.

There are private lands, even small tracts of private lands that cumulatively have fire risk, so it doesn't work to do it in a cookie-cutter fashion. We need to create the resiliency and we need to be responsive for a community that is next to a national forest that we are going to do the land treatments, especially when they are showing up. So, any work Congress can do to help us give that technical assistance across the border, we very much appreciate.

Mr. GALLEGO. And I understand, especially from the lessons that we learned from Yarnell in Arizona, how complex it could be fighting fires around WUI, and how complex it is in terms of the environment.

Can you just kind of go into details about why it is so complex to fight fires in that environment? I understand the difficulty of planning ahead of time, because you have to deal with multiple agencies, zoning, all this kind of stuff, and, of course, just individuals wildcatting out in the middle of nowhere, but can you just kind of describe for the Committee what is the overall problem that you are seeing and the complexity of it out there?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, Congressman, there are several factors. Certainly, when there is a community that is imminently at risk, that will take the focus of the firefighting effort, quite frankly, because human life, whether it is a firefighter's life or a public citizen's life, is utmost. So, it will take the emphasis away from the overall strategy on the fire.

And, quite frankly, we have increased fuel buildups on these lands, certainly on national forests, but on other lands as well, and that creates more intensity. We have extended drought and we have many areas that have extensive dead and dying trees, through insects and disease buildups. And all of those factors can

make it far more complex and high risk and, unfortunately, more expensive and more damaging.

Mr. GALLEGO. Finally, in the few minutes I have left, how will you guide the projects under the new categorical exclusion that we included as part of the Omnibus, to ensure that we are only removing the fuels that are accumulating in the forests and material that pose a high risk of fueling these fires?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, thank you. It is quite clear that the categorical exclusions are to create fire resiliency. There are numbers of ways to create that resiliency and some modification of the vegetation.

So, we have oversight. We will be looking. We have given specific guidance to the regions. They are doing their first look now, these are the reports that have to be in to me by tomorrow. Then we will be looking at what they have submitted and providing any guidance back. And we work with the local communities and the collaboratives that are established on these forests as well.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Tipton.

Mr. TIPTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Interim Chief Christiansen, thank you for being here as well. As you are probably aware, in southwest Colorado now, we have what is called the 416 Fire that is burning, have over 5,100 acres that have been burned. Five hundred homes were evacuated today. We have had over 1,276 homes already evacuated, 750 more homes are under pre-evacuation orders that are going on. It is only 10 percent contained.

And I have full respect, deep appreciation, and join with you in wanting to make sure that we keep our firefighters safe. We have 598 firefighters that are currently battling that blaze and 20 aircraft.

When we are talking about being able to keep some of the firefighters safe, when you get into the rugged terrain in southwest Colorado and the San Juan Mountains, it is difficult to be able to amble up and down those hillsides. Sometimes aerial firefighting is the best way to try to get some suppression and control over the fire. And I sent you a letter, and I don't know if you have had the opportunity—

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I have.

Mr. TIPTON. If you can maybe get into that just a little bit in terms of the call-when-needed aircraft versus the exclusive use, the determination by the Forest Service to be able to reduce that fleet from 20, I think, down to 13, if I recall correctly.

It is my understanding that the exclusive use, the cost is about 54 percent less. The response time is quicker. And I just wanted to be able to understand some of your thought process in terms of that decision.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Certainly, Congressman. We are closely watching the fire in the San Juan and hear your concerns.

Let me just first start by saying that large air tankers and aircraft are a very important wildland fire response tool, but they alone don't put out the fires. They slow the spread. They give the time for the ground crews to do the fireline construction and to separate the fuel. So, it is really in tandem.

For this year, we will have the same amount of air tankers available as we have had last year, 25 large air tankers available, and later in the summer, up to 30 more, and then we have additional surge capacity from the military and partners in Canada.

But in regards to your specific question of exclusive use and call-when-needed, we need to look at the entire season. And, yes, the call-when-needed large air tankers are more expensive on an hourly rate. But the exclusive use, of course, we pay for and are committed for the entire, we call it the minimum performance time.

So, we work hard to find the right balance to (a) provide protection to life and property and our critical natural resources; and (b) to give fiscal integrity to the taxpayers of this country. We will evaluate that balance and change that mix between exclusive use and call-when-needed after each season.

Mr. TIPTON. OK. I appreciate your answer on that.

I also want you maybe to speak, given some of the questions that we have had that I think have been very insightful, we have the roundheaded beetle, which is impacting some of the San Juan Forest again. North of Dolores, we have lost maybe 10,000 acres of pine trees that are in it. If you would speak a little bit to the importance of clearing out and thinning some of those stands.

I was outside of Pagosa Springs, and we were seeing a forest that the forest ranger pointed out to me had trees that were growing at elevations they should not be growing, undergrowth that had just taken over the forest floor, and how that actually increases something that was brought up earlier by you and others, the intensity of a fire and making it that much harder to be able to put out.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. You are absolutely right, Congressman. In my simple terms, I call it a smorgasbord. When you have a smorgasbord and you have all this to feed from, then the population is going to grow. And these are natural insects, but they have these big outbursts, because we are too overstocked.

And all these small dense trees are like big straws just sucking water out of the ground. So, the drought intensity becomes worse, they become weakened, and they die. So, very simply, the science is very clear, having the right stocking level is a forestry term, but the right amount of trees where they can be healthy and they can thrive and they can become bigger is where we have to be and where we are going.

Mr. TIPTON. Thanks. And I appreciate the great work that my colleague, Mr. Westerman, has done on the Resilient Forests Act to be able to help address some of those challenges.

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you.

Mr. Labrador.

Mr. LABRADOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding the hearing.

And, Ms. Christiansen, thank you for being here today.

According to the Forest Service, in Fiscal Year 2015, the USFS harvested less than 2.9 billion board feet of timber across 204,763 acres, far less than what is needed. And the June 1, 2018, forecast from the National Interagency Fire Center says that there is



potential for significant wildfire activity in most of the West, including Idaho.

What do you see as the sustainable level of harvest from the Forest Service, and how can you ensure that the industries that rely heavily on wood products have the resources they need at an affordable price?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congressman. It is more activity in the forest to create more resiliency. Now, that is not all. Creating the resiliency, reducing the fire hazard, as not every acre is going to produce board feet. Some of it is reducing very small dense vegetation. An integrated approach, in many of these landscapes where we do some mechanical treatment and then we go in and we do prescribed fire, is going to get us to where we need to be.

Now, producing timber does have an outcome of critical products for communities. And partly, it will reduce hazardous conditions, but it is not a one-for-one on each acre. And we——

Mr. LABRADOR. I understand that, but are we seeing an increase or a decrease in fires?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We are seeing an increase in fire, and we are committed to increase our work in treating hazardous fuels, thanks to Congress' commitment to us and investment, and the amount of board feet or vegetation——

Mr. LABRADOR. What is the sustainable level of harvest from the Forest Service? If we want to see a decrease in fire and we want to see an increase in board feet, what should we be doing? Because, obviously, we are seeing the opposite. We are seeing more fires.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. We are committed to go up to 4 billion board feet in the next 2 years.

Mr. LABRADOR. OK. The forest products industry in Idaho and I are also concerned about the costs associated with NEPA compliance. As you know, time spent preparing NEPA documents pulls valuable taxpayer dollars from other parts of the Forest Service. A report from 2016 found in 2006 alone, the nearly 6,000 actions required by NEPA cost the Forest Service nearly \$365 million.

That number is curious to me, because it averaged out to about \$1 million a day over the course of a year. I know this Administration and you are interested in renewing and streamlining the NEPA review process. What is the Forest Service doing to reform the process?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you. We launched a concerted effort 8 months ago. I call it deconstructing the entire process. It is not to cut corners, but it is to rebuild back the analysis based on good science that is needed and nothing more than what is needed.

We have held 13 workshops across the Nation, got good ideas from 55,000 comments on our notice to do new rulemaking for our procedures and our policies and training our line officers. We are deconstructing across our whole agency. And I am pleased to report, in just 8 months, we have reduced the timeline, and in that 8-month period, we have reduced the cost by \$30 million. So, we saved \$30 million that we can put on active management on the ground, and we are just getting started.

Mr. LABRADOR. What are your long-lasting solutions for this problem?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Our long-lasting solution is better training, more simplified processes, using our science in the right place where we need it to be defensible in our good quality environmental decisions, and being inclusive, but not overdoing the process and what is needed. We have a goal of a 10 percent improvement this year, a 10 percent next year in 2019, and a 20 percent improvement in 2020.

Mr. LABRADOR. OK. Our office is frequently contacted by county commissioners who struggle to pay the bills for schools, roads, bridges. The Forest Service routinely relies on stewardship contracts and Good Neighbor Authority to do work necessary in the forest. As you are aware, Good Neighbor Authority and stewardship contracting does not require revenue sharing with the counties. How can we encourage the Forest Service to use traditional timber sales so that local communities can benefit economically?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I definitely hear the concern, Congressman. We have found that by using all three tools, we are able to get more work done. We are able to do it with our partners across boundaries at a landscape level. But I do understand the consequences that only timber sales provide the revenues. With the new Secure Rural Schools, Congress gave the funds that the county really needs and they were dependent on.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you.

General Bergman.

Mr. BERGMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Ms. Christiansen, for being here. It is great to have you onboard.

Which one of the four national forests would you like to visit first in the 1st District of Michigan: the Manistee, the Huron, the Hiawatha, or the Ottawa? I am going to presuppose there is already room for you in the Ottawa.

But having said that, when you have a district with four national forests in it and you live in the middle of one, it becomes very personal when it comes to seeing how stretched the Forest Service resources and assets have been over the decades and what kind of declines that can cause. Regardless, if everything remained the same, when you have less people doing the work necessary to be done and resources diverted to other parts of the country, you can see a long-term degradation.

Again, we are glad to have you onboard, because I know you bring not only experience but a fresh look at how we are going to accomplish some big challenges.

Here we are in the 2018 Omnibus, they made a big change in how wildfire funding is apportioned. With a new funding strategy in effect in 2020, how is the Forest Service preparing, and how will it capitalize on new program funding certainty?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congressman. You articulated that very well. We have 39 percent less employees working on the non-fire programs than we did 15 years ago. There has been a real decline, as you articulate. And when the fire funding fix goes into effect in 2020, it will stabilize our operations. So, that continued decline of the critical work on the preventative side, the proactive side, the doing the work we need to do, providing the services and recreation and opportunities, at least we will be stabilized.

My message consistently, since I stepped into this role, is it is not business as usual. We have an opportunity, we must perform. We must take these tools, we must put them into play, and with the hope and the knowledge that our operating environment is going to be stabilized in 2020 so the 10-year rising average doesn't keep eating into that piece of the pie.

Mr. BERGMAN. Let me ask you a question, because I know my time will run out here. Obviously, you have a handle on this. Do you think you are going to have to borrow any funds for this year? And if so, how much?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Congressman, the mean projection is right around the amount of money that we have, \$1.5 billion roughly. That is the median projection from our scientists. So, if we go on the upper end, which is to \$1.9 billion, there would be a good chance we would have to borrow.

Mr. BERGMAN. OK.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. But we do appreciate Congress' additional \$500 million in the suppression account.

Mr. BERGMAN. And, you know, you as the chief, you play a huge role in setting the tone setting, as we would say in the military, the command climate for the Forest Service. And the Fiscal Year 2018 Omnibus included new authorities to help the Forest Service do its job more efficiently and effectively. However, new authorities mean little if they are not implemented effectively by the Agency without delay.

What's your plan to ensure that the authorities provided in the Fiscal Year 2018 Omnibus are implemented sooner rather than later and effectively?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. Thank you. I have appointed my top leaders that we are going to do our oversight ourselves. It is in the performance accountability of all my senior leaders, and I am getting out personally to every region to have them tell me why they can't put these into place, and what do they need to get them executed in a timely way.

You are right, I set the tone and those expectations are set. And while I am in this job, you can count on me.

Mr. BERGMAN. Well, good, then I don't have to ask you the next question. I see my time is running out. I know you will hold everybody, including yourself, but especially those underneath you, accountable for their actions because that will lead to the results we need.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Gianforte.

Mr. GIANFORTE. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Christiansen, for being here.

Last year, I was on the ground for five fires in Montana. I was even fortunate enough to have Secretary Perdue join myself and Secretary Zinke at one fire. We saw firsthand the result of failing to manage our forests. We had over 1.2 million acres, as you are well aware, burn in Montana last year. It is about the size of the entire state of Delaware. Livelihoods were threatened. We lost two lives. Wildlife habitats were destroyed. And we had dangerous air quality for many of our communities, including ash falling on cars.

It was a terrible thing. We almost don't have a summer anymore; it is just the smoke season.

As you stated, Chief Christiansen, the fire season is getting longer, and what used to be a once-in-a-lifetime event is now becoming a common occurrence. When catastrophic wildfires strike, we keep treating the symptoms by just suppressing the fires, and somehow we think that the next wildfire season will be different. We have to address the underlying issues.

And I agree with the comments that you have made here, and I appreciate your leadership on this. We have to make our forests healthier so we can make the wildfire season less severe. That was why I was really encouraged by the wildfire funding fix, as well as some of the forest management reforms in the Omnibus. It is a good first step, but we have to do more. I, too, share your affinity for the Good Neighbor Authority, and I urge you to continue to partner with willing states to perform more active management.

Ms. Christiansen, to promote fire resilient forest and recovery after a catastrophic event, how is the Forest Service utilizing salvage logging for post-fire and post-disease stands of trees.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congressman. I am quite pleased and proud of our folks in Region 1. They had a tough year, as well as all the citizens did, and they executed immediately. Regional Forester Martin put strike teams together, just like we do in fire response, and said we have to figure out where we can go to get our salvage done, where is the right place and how can we expedite it.

They worked with industry, because we needed to get their evaluation of what their capacity was to take these materials. We used our analytics to do a broad brush first of what was available, not on a steep slope, not in the wilderness, and then took that to industry. And they focused in on the acres that had the biggest chance for salvage.

We have an authority on my approval, the chief's approval, an emergency situation determination where it would forego the process of a review for public challenge. That is if the public was involved early in the process. I signed the first one of those last week. I expect four more coming in. Regional Forester Martin knows what my expectations are, and I anticipate signing all those as well.

Mr. GIANFORTE. OK. And I understand these salvage operations actually generate revenue which can be used for reforestations. This is part of the recovery.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes.

Mr. GIANFORTE. I appreciate that. I understand the Forest Service current salvage categorical exclusion is limited to about 250 acres per project. In an era where fires are measured in thousands, tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of acres, is this 250-acre limit a restriction?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, yes, it could be, but with the new categorical exclusion for fire resiliency, we believe in some areas it will qualify that we can use that.

Mr. GIANFORTE. So, if we were able to increase the categorical exclusion for salvage operations to more like landscaped size

projects, would that give you more discretion to get our forests healthier again?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We will use any tool that you give us, Congressman.

Mr. GIANFORTE. OK. I appreciate the work you are doing in Region 1 in particular, and your leadership despite all of the frivolous litigation that we navigate through to do these projects. I appreciate you continuing to work with me and my colleagues to make our forests healthier.

With that, I yield back.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for having this hearing.

Ms. Christiansen, I have a comment and then I am going to ask you a couple of questions. My comment is based on earlier discussion on what causes forest fires. I harken back to the Hayman fire in Colorado in 2002, where one citizen was killed, five firefighters died en route to the fire, \$40 million of firefighting costs, 133 homes destroyed, and 138,000 acres burned. There was a direct cause and what we concluded in Colorado was an indirect cause.

The direct cause, amazingly, was a U.S. Forest Service employee started the fire. But the indirect cause is we realize that environmental laws had kept forests from being cleared. There was just an excess buildup of fuel. So, we blamed environmentalists for the fire. That is the perspective of a lot of us in Colorado. You don't have to comment.

My questions, though, the first one, and this will help with fighting fires, is about very large air tankers, VLATs. I want to thank you for working with my office, with the U.S. Army, and Colorado Springs Airport to locate a new VLAT tanker base at the Colorado Springs Airport. Right now, the nearest ones are Phoenix and Roswell, New Mexico. This temporary base hopefully will become permanent and it will allow the Forest Service to utilize VLATs faster and in a more cost-effective way. It will also help the MAFFS mission, the C-130s, located at Fort Carson to fight fires.

I hope that we can do this beyond this current year, but I am concerned going forward that there seems to be a reluctance about the Forest Service using VLATs, very large air tankers.

Last year, for instance, the Forest Service published a VLAT solicitation and then withdrew it before there were any responses. A few weeks ago, they published another solicitation, but then withdrew it a week later. Why is there difficulty in bringing a solicitation to completion? And is the Global SuperTanker, which is based in my district, excluded from competing for Forest Service contracts?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you, Congressman. Let me address the VLATs first. They are a very effective tool in the right conditions. And when we were in the transition from the legacy aircraft 5 years ago in 2012, to these next generation, I have to say that all the vendors really stepped up and created some really useful platforms, because we didn't know. We were working together to create these new platforms. And as we have gotten better at understanding their performance, we also, quite frankly, have to do our

due diligence to the taxpayers and do contracting where we can have the right resources in the right conditions.

So, VLATs are very important in the right place. We don't always need 19,000 gallons of retardant, with some fuel types we may. I am disappointed. In our contracting, it was just an error that it had to get pulled back for a week. It is out now, and we are working diligently to make sure all vendors have access and that we have access to them, both by getting the right resources and doing our fiduciary response—

Mr. LAMBORN. You will work with us on making this more available?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, sir.

Mr. LAMBORN. OK, thank you.

And last, real quickly, unfortunately there are, in Colorado, some illegal marijuana growing operations on Federal lands, including Forest Service land. And this wreaks havoc on wildlife, the water, terrain, and everything else. It is a safety hazard for people who stumble upon these because cartels are involved, and law enforcement is troubled by this obviously.

What can Congress do to help the Forest Service fight these illegal growing operations?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you. You are absolutely right, we see an uptick—it is more than an uptick, it is a steep increase—in the amount of what these drug trafficking organizations are growing on the National Forest System, Colorado and California in particular, and the illegal pesticides they bring in that are really health hazards. And we find, when we have the resources to go in and remove the operation, then the chances of it to be reoccupied are far less. Sometimes we don't have the resources to actually deconstruct every one of these because there are so many, and then they will come and get reoccupied. So, it has really helped to get every one of those remediated and out of there, and great partnerships with our other Federal, state, and local partners as well.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you. We will work with you on that.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Chairman Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Chief; thanks for being here. Let me go through about four areas with you, if I could.

First of all, I would like to talk to you about the Good Neighbor Authority, then maybe a followup on what Mr. Westerman was asking in his question, perhaps talking about Puerto Rico as well, your board feet goal, and then you can play around with the marijuana that is owned in Colorado.

With the Good Neighbor Authority, you have already said that the number of agreements alone is not indicative of the quantity of work that is going on. For example, Utah's schedule in 2019, drew about 50,000 acres. Is that typical of the pace and scale of these agreements or is that an outlier?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Congressman, I think it is pretty typical. And these agreements, certainly a large part of them are vegetation management, but some of them are stream improvements and they might be other activities that you really can't do an apples-to-apples comparison on amount of acres. So, I would say it is about average, but it might be a little bit higher than normal.

Mr. BISHOP. So, for example, if the timelines and the scope were to be expanded, would you be able to accomplish more?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I am sorry, I don't understand—timelines and scope of the good neighbor?

Mr. BISHOP. Of the good neighbor agreements.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. Well, certainly now with the addition to be able to do road maintenance and reconstruction, we can certainly get more done.

Mr. BISHOP. What plans do you have of either expanding these or are there limitations to your ability to expand the timelines and the scope of these agreements?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Our timelines are, you may not have been in the room, but every one of our regions has to get a plan to me by tomorrow of how they are updating the Good Neighbor Agreements, to include the new roads provision.

In regards to the second part of your question, it really takes a willing partner, and our states are showing up in a big way. But not every state has the capacity, so we are working on ways to help the state have capacity as well.

Mr. BISHOP. Is there stuff Congress can do to eliminate limitations on your abilities to grant them?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We are still learning, but I think there probably are, and we would be glad to work with you. I really appreciate that question.

Mr. BISHOP. All right. Well, I will work with you in the future.

I was not able to hear everything you said for Mr. Westerman's question about what you were doing to try to increase the carryout versus the burnout. Do you want to expand on your answer? You were kind of cut off on the response to his question.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. So, if we are only looking at our fire resiliency, then we have the analysis and we can show how many acres we can treat and which acres we should treat first and when we are going to have the most protected. But we are also trying to balance the timber outputs and the other goals of what we are trying to manage on the landscape.

So, it is not a one-for-one answer of what kind of outputs we want. We have a tool that we are working on, a model that can show how much timber output we are trying to get, how much reduced hazard on the landscape and critical watersheds or in wildland-urban interface areas and how much acres can be treated. We want to sit down with the states and local leadership, with all of you in the committees, and talk about what those trade-offs are. But certainly more work is needed, and we are committed to do more work.

Mr. BISHOP. All right. I know a member of our Committee, Representative González, has written Secretary Perdue about what you intend to do on the reforestation of the Puerto Rico forest. I have like 1 minute, so you can spend like 20 seconds on that and maybe answer in letter form later on. Could you also at some point tell me if your goal is 4 billion board feet? You are at 3 right now?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We are at 3.4 for this year.

Mr. BISHOP. You don't have a bigger goal than that? Do Puerto Rico first and then hit where your goals are supposed to be.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. OK. Our reforestation funds are limited because of how many acres and how many hurricanes we have, in addition to our regular reforestation, so we are working on a solution. And I would be happy to work with you to see what you might be able to do to help us on Puerto Rico.

Mr. BISHOP. And a bigger goal?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. A bigger goal? Yes, we are working on—

Mr. BISHOP. Maybe I just heard it wrong. Your real goal is 40 billion, right?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, sir. Beyond my lifetime, but yes, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. OK, thank you.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you.

Mr. Gosar.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you.

Acting Chief Christiansen, good seeing you. I understand that a small group of U.S. Forest Service leaders were convened to create a vision for the forest products modernization, a strategic effort to better align the Forest Service's culture, policy, and procedures to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration. And I understand that solution teams were convened to develop specific recommendations and that those recommendations were due in March or April of this year.

Have the solution teams completed their work and have they reported to you, the Acting Director?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you. The solution teams are all physically in this week. They are finalizing their recommendations, and that will be coming to me in the next few weeks.

Dr. GOSAR. Could you give us several examples of substantial or innovative solutions that will speed up forest restoration in the western United States, where tens of millions of acres are vulnerable to catastrophic fire?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. I will be really frank. Our policies that were created several years ago don't match our current conditions with the different kinds of vegetation that we need to remove. And technology has changed significantly and we have not kept up with what technology can do. We are starting to implement virtual boundaries so we don't have to do all the surveying, and there are several technology answers. And then, quite frankly, it is about our culture, about not being stuck in the way we have always done business and pushing our folks to innovate, but also giving them an opportunity to have some learning and some failures with that.

Dr. GOSAR. I am going to stray a little bit here. Are you familiar with Nature Conservancy's lidar?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I am.

Dr. GOSAR. And is that a direction in which you are going to go?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, sir.

Dr. GOSAR. I mean, this is rocket science that is a no-brainer.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, it is.

Dr. GOSAR. So, when will these innovative aspects be implemented? Give us a date. We are already behind. We are in June, when we were expecting March and April to have these done. So, talk to me about what you are setting as a date for implementation.



Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, I had benchmarked for the end of this year and then what is going to get accomplished in Fiscal Year 2019. More specific dates than that, Congressman, I don't have, but I would be glad to get back with you.

Dr. GOSAR. I am antsy just because we have a horrendous fire season ahead of us and we can't wait.

Will you need to have modifications to the handbook or the manual directives be necessary to implement these innovations?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. I am certain we will.

Dr. GOSAR. And when do you think those changes would be done?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. The goal would be to get those moving by the end of this year.

Dr. GOSAR. Were there any solutions identified that would require congressional action? I know that you still haven't got them, but have you seen any of these?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Not anything yet, but I really appreciate the openness that we can come talk to you.

Dr. GOSAR. OK. In Arizona, the Forest Service has over 500,000 acres of timber that have been cleared through the need for process. And a vast majority of timber that needs to be removed is small diameter. With the low economic value, what is the Forest Service doing to streamline its business practice, reduce the cost, and make the timber more economically accessible to the industry?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, Congressman, it really performed in getting the need for clearing acres and getting it implemented has been—

Dr. GOSAR. I want to share with you, the business is gone and so we are having to re-bring the business back. There is no trust there because you have the lawsuits from CBD and all these other aspects that have really put them out of business. So, we have to reinvent the business of the timber industry, particularly down in the Southwest.

I think that is the frustration, are we going to be creative or are we going to have more flexibility with our foresters? Are they going to have some nimbleness that they can actually input at the local level? Because this is getting frustrating, because out of these 500,000 acres, we still haven't even hit 15,000 acres on an average year in clearing.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. We are offering contracts outside of Phase 1 of the large stewardship with the main contractor on 4FRI, so we are putting some other things into place and we are working with Arizona Corporation Commission, because really this is breaking new ground, as you said. And Regional Forester Joyner and I talk often about pushing the envelope, and there are the FARs, the Federal Acquisition Regulations, that is a constraint on how we do our contracting. But as I said, we have to push the envelope on that.

We are really trying to be creative. We are using other expertise, quite frankly, of how we break through and attract industry, which as you said, is much needed there.

Dr. GOSAR. I will have other questions for you in regards to disposable lands within the Forest Service. So, thank you.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Thank you.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. LaMalfa.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the Committee time today.

And I thank you, Chief Christiansen, for your appearance here today, as well as your close attention to this and on our issues in California. Thank you.

You spoke about it here with the recent adoption of vegetation management and power line zones on Forest Service land in the recent Omnibus bill. You alluded to that in that I think you were saying you are announcing some rules and implementation tomorrow as part of that package?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes, we have done some guidance out to the regions of what is clearly expected, the timelines, how we need to be responsive on these vegetation management projects, yes.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. What does that look like for this coming season in effect, I mean, with what you are putting out? Are we going to be able to fast forward this so they can utilize this tool effectively here in June, July, August, and September as they see a real world need?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Yes. As the utilities come forward with their projects, that is my expectation to the regional foresters and what they have to report back to me on how they are getting themselves set up to be able to be responsive to those vegetation management requests from the utilities.

Mr. LAMALFA. Because the bottom line we are looking at for others that are watching and listening, is that if you have a hazardous tree, a dead tree, or a leaning tree that could easily fall into a power line, you know, a 60-foot high tree, and the power lines are only 40 feet off the ground, then we know what that zone would look like.

So, in a practical effect, if the utility has identified a tree or several trees in a zone like this that they feel strongly would be a threat like that, what is your ideal goal for the turnaround to be for that being brought to the attention of the Forest Service, say, on a Monday morning and being able to go out and remove the tree in question? What would you see as an ideal turnaround there?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, Congressman, certainly that (a) we are responsive, we are providing good service, and we are being practical about it. And if it is an immediate threat, I would expect it to be taken care of.

Mr. LAMALFA. I mean, I can't probably pin you down on a number of days, but truly, when we were talking before this legislation, it would be 6 months or longer to get permitting and all that. I would hope we are talking a week or two or sooner. Shoot, I would like to see maybe more discretion of the utility, that there is a little trust there, take a few pictures of it and say we removed it Monday because it was about to fall into it. We get two bad things: you get a blackout and you get, very likely, a forest fire.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Certainly. There is guidance in the provisions that, I don't have in front of me, but I have made it known that we need to meet the time frames in the new provision, absolutely.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. Because, again, with the terrible fire season we had in northern California last year, I mean, our utilities are going to face a lot of blame and the brunt of a lot of scorn, and

some of it is misplaced because I think as they have the latitude and ability, they are trimming back the tree hazard where that interface is.

So, I look forward to working more with you on this and being effective on this. We know what the goal is, and it is a reasonable goal. I can't believe there is opposition to this here in the year 2018, that we are still identifying that when we have a hazardous tree, we need to get it away from the power lines, but indeed.

So, in the practical effect of NEPA streamlining, what is the bottom line on that looking like with how you can streamline your NEPA process in a practical effect in the short term?

Ms. CHRISTIANSEN. Well, it is really looking at what tool is needed. Quite frankly, we don't believe we need a full EIS on every project when an environmental assessment may be appropriate. It is getting back into balance our risk tolerance with our folks, what is expected. It is really deconstructing all of our practices and policies and only doing the things that are needed for a quality environmental review. And holding ourselves and our leaders and the practitioners accountable, that we don't just start something and lose track of it, we have to be on time and on task.

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes. Especially the frustration on how that applies to salvage after a fire has already occurred and we need that time of recovery. Thank you, Chief Christiansen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Again, Chief Christiansen, thank you so much for your testimony today. We promised to get you out by 4 o'clock, and I think we will be able to keep that promise.

Our objectives are to restore public access to the public lands, restore good management to the public lands, and to restore the Federal Government as a good neighbor to those communities impacted by the public lands. And you will certainly have the full backing of this Subcommittee as you pursue those goals.

Members of the Committee, in spite of all of the questions, we may have additional questions for you which we will submit in writing. Under our Committee Rules, Members will submit those questions within 3 business days, and then the hearing record will be kept open for 10 business days for those responses.

If there is no further business to come before the Subcommittee, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:53 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

## **Rep. Grijalva Submission**

**Center for Biological Diversity \* Conservation Northwest  
Defenders of Wildlife \* Earth Justice \* KS Wild  
National Parks Conservation Association \* Sierra Club  
The Wilderness Society \* Western Environmental Law Center**

June 7, 2018

Hon. TOM MCCLINTOCK, *Chairman,*  
Hon. COLLEEN HANABUSA, *Ranking Member,*  
*House Natural Resources Committee,*  
*Subcommittee on Federal Lands,*  
*1324 Longworth House Office Building,*  
*Washington, DC 20515.*

Dear Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Hanabusa:

We write to provide our views on the oversight hearing to examine “Wildfire Risk, Forest Health, and Associated Management Priorities of the U.S. Forest Service.” We respectfully request that you include this letter in the hearing record.

We appreciate you taking the time to examine these important issues. Wildland fires play an important role in regulating ecosystems, but climate change, decades of fire suppression, unsustainable logging, and other activities have altered natural processes on our national forests and interconnected public lands. Meanwhile, more residential development near wildlands has increased the likelihood that fire will impact people and property, often with devastating consequences.

Last year’s record setting fire season contributed to a tragic loss of life and property that drained federal, state, and local resources. The stories and images of wildland fire engulfing homes and communities are heart wrenching, and those impacted often look to lawmakers and land management agencies wanting to know what, if anything, could have been done to prevent these losses.

Fortunately, Congress recently took meaningful action by including a bipartisan fire funding agreement in the FY18 Omnibus. For years prior, the rising cost of wildland fires had forced the Forest Service and other land management agencies to borrow funds from other programs, including those intended to reduce fire risk near communities. By finally fixing how the federal government plans for and funds wildfires, Congress has provided the Forest Service with a unique opportunity to use their existing management tools and work with the public, states, and communities to address the needs of our national forests.

Despite the wildfire funding fix having strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, this commonsense policy solution lingered for years, hamstrung by the demand to pair the budget fix with controversial forest management policies. When properly applied, science-based forest management tools can help restore national forests and other lands where needed and when paired with initiatives to create defensible space and community readiness, protect against the loss of life and property from wildland fire.

However, proposals to undermine bedrock environmental laws and recklessly promote logging over clean water, recreation, and wildlife do nothing to improve the health of our national forests, while creating public controversy and opposition.

Congress should resist legislating unsound logging projects and practices and allow the Forest Service to use the many existing tools it has at its disposal to help keep our communities safe from wildfire and preserve the priceless values that our national forests provide. The future of our national forests and public lands and the health and safety of our communities depend on the availability of adequate resources, science-based forest restoration, efforts to improve community readiness, and an understanding of the risks inherent to more development in fire prone areas. Reckless rollbacks of bedrock environmental laws like the National Environmental Policy Act, Roadless Rule, and Endangered Species Act are simply the wrong approach.

We encourage Congress to continue the important oversight needed to ensure that our land management agencies are properly funded, equipped to respond to wildland fire, appropriately applying forest management tools, and protect the clean water, wildlife, and recreational values of our public lands.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity  
Conservation Northwest  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earth Justice  
KS Wild

National Parks Conservation Assoc.  
Sierra Club  
The Wilderness Society  
Western Environmental Law Center

