

**INVESTING IN WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT,
ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION, AND
RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: EXAMINING
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIPARTISAN
INFRASTRUCTURE LAW**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS,
AND PUBLIC LANDS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON “INVESTING IN
WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT, ECOSYSTEM RES-
TORATION, AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES:
EXAMINING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW”**

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

U.S. House of Representatives

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:11 a.m., in room 1324, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Joe Neguse [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Neguse, Sablan, Tonko, Tlaib, Gallego, Leger Fernández, Dingell, Porter, Grijalva (ex officio); Herrell, Tiffany, Gohmert, McClintock, Rosendale, Moore, and Westerman (ex officio).

Mr. NEGUSE. The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands will come to order. The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on investing in wildfire management, ecosystem restoration, and resilient communities: examining implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at hearings are limited to the Chair and the Ranking Minority Member or their designee. This will allow us to hear from our witnesses sooner and help Members keep to their schedules. Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that all other Members' opening statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted to the Clerk by 5 p.m. today or the close of the hearing, whichever comes first.

Without objection, the Chair may also declare a recess subject to the call of the Chair. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

As described in the notice, statements and documents or motions must be submitted to the electronic repository at HNRCDocs@mail.house.gov. Members physically present here should provide a hard copy for staff to distribute by e-mail. Please note that Members are responsible for their own microphones, as with our fully in-person meetings. This is a hybrid meaning, of course. Members can be muted by staff to avoid inadvertent background noise.

Finally, Members or witnesses experiencing any technical problems should inform Committee staff as soon as possible.

With that, I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOE NEGUSE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO**

Mr. NEGUSE. First, let me say thank you to each of the witnesses for being here today and to my fellow colleagues on both sides of the aisle for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands oversight hearing on implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We are happy to be back here in person in the Committee room to host this hybrid hearing on a topic that I certainly know merits a high level of interest from Members on both sides of the dais and is of particular importance to communities in my state of Colorado.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a historic investment in our country's infrastructure, which included billions of dollars for the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service to support natural infrastructure, to reduce wildfire risk, restore healthy ecosystems, and build safe, resilient communities.

In my district in Colorado, Colorado's 2nd Congressional District, communities from the Front Range to the Continental Divide have been deeply impacted by unprecedented wildfires in recent years, including the Marshall Fire in December 2021, the Cameron Peak Fire in 2020, and the East Troublesome Fire in that year as well.

The reality that we are living with throughout the Rocky Mountain West is that wildfires are no longer simply contained to a season. They are year-round. There are no wildfire seasons in Colorado or in the Rocky Mountain West. There are wildfire years. And these fires are now occurring in larger areas at higher intensity, and it is only projected to increase in the coming years as a result of climate change.

In my community in Colorado, back in December on New Year's Eve, 1,084 homes were destroyed literally within an 18-hour time period in the most destructive wildfire that has ever occurred in Colorado. We need more Federal firefighting resources. We need to invest in our forests. And, ultimately, we need to take wildfire resiliency and mitigation seriously for our communities, for our families, and for the many people that we represent in the western United States.

That is why, as Chair of this Subcommittee, we have prioritized wildfire oversight and legislation, including hearings on Build Back Better, natural disasters, climate change, the Civilian Climate Corps, public lands management and workforce and, yes, forest management as well. For example, the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Act, which I was proud to introduce alongside Senator Bennet, was included and funded in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

As with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and more recently, the Forest Service' ambitious 10-Year Wildfire Plan, the goal is to promote more fire-adapted landscapes and reduce the vulnerability of at-risk communities.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law combines investments in hazardous fuels, prescribed fire, and fuel breaks, alongside programs to reform the wildfire workforce and increase firefighter pay, improve community wildfire defenses, and support more science-based monitoring and ecosystem restoration.

The law also funded wildfire response and pre-planning workshops, burned area recovery, and significantly increases funding available through the Reforestation Trust Fund. Beyond Federal Lands, the BIL, the Infrastructure Law, also includes critical investments to enable an ‘all-lands’ landscape-scale approach to wildfire preparedness.

This multi-layered approach provides land management agencies with a generational opportunity to demonstrate a paradigm shift away from commercial management and emergency suppression and toward fire adaptation and ecosystem services.

In that regard, some of the primary implementation questions for the Natural Resources Committee include: evaluating the adequacy of these investments in the context of annual appropriations, measuring success beyond board feet and acres treated, and assessing if additional investments, workforce, or policy changes may be necessary.

While I recognize that there is genuine bipartisan interest in these issues, I would be remiss if I didn’t say it’s unfortunate that my friends on the other side of the aisle voted against this legislation that I have described and all of the myriad benefits that I think it will have for forest management.

But I hope that they will join us in the efforts that are well underway to build on the success that we have achieved as a result of that Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including expanding compensation for wildland firefighter pay. I understand that we can expect some clarity on the wildland firefighter classification issue, which I have touched on in prior hearings in May from the Administration.

And I hope that we can continue to work together on Tim’s Act, which is my legislation with Republican Representative Liz Cheney, that establishes a minimum wage for Federal firefighters and provides incentives and benefits needed to support and retain an effective Federal wildland firefighter workforce.

Finally, I’d like to thank our witnesses from the Administration for joining us in person today. I know there is a lot moving with the Fiscal Year 2023 budget, implementation of the Omnibus, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, so no shortage of pressing issues for all of you to grapple with.

We very much appreciate you taking the time to visit with us today. As you know, these investments are of the utmost importance to the members of this Committee on both sides of the aisle. We all have a vested interest in transparent, effective, and efficient implementation of the law.

With that, I look forward to your testimony.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Neguse follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. JOE NEGUSE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO

Thank you all for being here today for the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands oversight hearing on implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

I’m happy to be back here in the Committee room today to host this hybrid hearing on a topic I know merits a high level of interest from members on both sides of the aisle, and is of particular importance to the communities in my state.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is a historic investment in our country’s infrastructure, which included billions for the Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest

Service to support natural infrastructure, reduce wildfire risk, restore healthy ecosystems, and build safe, resilient communities.

In my district in Colorado, communities from the Front Range to the Continental Divide have been deeply impacted by unprecedented wildfires in recent years, including the Marshall Fire in December 2021.

The reality we're living with throughout the West is that wildfires are not just contained to a season, but burn year-round in larger areas at higher intensity, and this is only projected to increase as a result of climate change.

That is why, as Chair of this Subcommittee, I have prioritized wildfire oversight and legislation, including hearings on Build Back Better, natural disasters and climate change, Civilian Climate Corps, public lands workforce, and, yes, even forest management.

For example, the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Act, which I was proud to introduce alongside Senator Bennet, was included and funded in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

As with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and more recently, the Forest Service' 10-Year Wildfire Plan, the goal is to promote more fire-adapted landscapes and reduce the vulnerability of at-risk communities.

To that end, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law combines investments in hazardous fuels, prescribed fire, and fuel breaks alongside programs to reform the wildfire workforce and increase firefighter pay, improve community wildfire defenses, and support more science-based monitoring and ecosystem restoration.

The infrastructure law also funds wildfire response and pre-planning workshops, burned area recovery, and significantly increases funding available through the Reforestation Trust Fund.

Beyond Federal lands, the BIL includes critical investments to enable an 'all-lands' landscape-scale approach to wildfire preparedness.

This multi-layered approach provides land management agencies with a generational opportunity to demonstrate a paradigm shift away from commercial management and emergency suppression, and toward fire adaptation and ecosystem services.

In this regard, some of the primary implementation questions for the Natural Resources Committee include: Evaluating adequacy of these investments in the context of annual appropriations; measuring success beyond board feet and acres treated; and assessing if additional investments, workforce, or policy changes are needed.

While I recognize there is genuine bipartisan interest in these issues, it's unfortunate that every current Republican Member of this Committee voted against the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Committee Republicans have consistently opposed bipartisan investments and programs to address climate change, conservation, wildfire, biodiversity, and workforce needs, including those germane to today's hearing.

Fortunately, there is some good news on the workforce front: I would like to thank the Biden administration and the witnesses here for their efforts to ensure no Federal wildfire firefighter makes less than \$15 an hour, while working to address mental health needs and other line-of-duty hazards.

I understand we can expect some clarity on the 'wildland firefighter' classification by May, and I hope we can continue to work together on Tim's Act—my legislation that establishes a minimum wage for Federal firefighters, and provides incentives and benefits needed to support and retain an effective Federal wildland firefighter workforce.

Lastly, I'd like to thank our witnesses from the Administration for joining us in person today. I know there is a lot moving with the FY23 budget, implementation of FY22 Omnibus, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and we appreciate your time today.

As you know these investments are of the utmost importance to the members of this Committee and we all have a vested interest in transparent, effective, and efficient implementation of the law.

I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. NEGUSE. I will yield back the remainder of my time and recognize Ranking Member Herrell for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. YVETTE HERRELL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO

Ms. HERRELL. Thank you, Mr. Speaker—sorry, I just gave you a raise.

Mr. NEGUSE. No, thank you. I appreciate the promotion.

Ms. HERRELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today, we meet to discuss the implementation of the wildfire ecosystem restoration provisions contained in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This marks the very first time that our Committee will have a chance to meaningfully weigh in on this effort, as the House was completely shut out of the regular order process in crafting the so-called bipartisan law.

So, while we welcome the opportunity to provide oversight, this hearing is, at best, a half a year late. And, frankly, the apparent lack of anger from my friends on the other side of the aisle of this dais who are equally barred from offering meaningful input on an infrastructure package is baffling.

The items we are discussing today are of profound importance for our nation as a whole and especially our Western states that have experienced historical devastation from our seemingly endless catastrophic wildfire crisis. My home state of New Mexico has had over 2,700 fires burn over half a million acres over the last 5 years.

And in the last 2 years, we had record-breaking wildfire seasons that have burned a collective 17 million acres nationwide. Our Western communities have grown painfully accustomed to deadly and destructive blazes wreaking havoc year after year.

The wildfire and ecosystem restoration provisions that we are going to discuss today do little more than light money on fire by throwing millions of dollars at the wildfire crisis without pairing it with meaningful regulatory reform to ensure our lands are actually managed properly. Decades of consistent mismanagement have shown that it is not a lack of funding that has prevented us from properly tackling our wildfire crisis but rather onerous regulations and endless litigation from activist environmentalist groups.

For instance, while the Forest Service's overall budget has more than doubled since 2014, the amount of hazardous fuel treatments have remained frustratingly stagnant, only addressing roughly 2 percent of their needs annually. I am concerned that the recently announced 10-year strategy to combat the wildfire crisis will fall short because not only are the tools not in place to implement this strategy, but the Forest Service is also relying on only 5 years of funding to execute a 10-year plan. This is especially concerning considering yesterday's release of the Department of the Interior's wildfire strategy, which is only 5 years. If given the chance, Committee Republicans would have offered real improvements to the infrastructure package to truly address the foundational obstacles that have continuously bogged down responsible management of our fire-prone forests. This includes the Resilient Federal Forest Act which I am proudly co-sponsoring.

I also introduced the Wildfire Prevention and Drought Mitigation Act, which was included in that package. That would protect drought-affected forest communities from catastrophic wildfire by streamlining the environmental review process for active forest management projects aimed at protecting watersheds, wildlife

habitat, snowpack, and improving water quality. The Resilient Federal Forest Act also included streamlining based on firesheds, which the new 10-year strategy is based on. These substantive pieces of legislation would unquestionably lead to better management of our forests and better recovery from the devastation left in the wake of past wildfires.

I do look forward to hearing from the Administration today, and I want to thank the witnesses for being here. And while the so-called Bipartisan Infrastructure Law undeniably falls short on truly unleashing the type of wildfire treatments and restoration work necessary to respond to this historic crisis, it is vital that we do everything we can to ensure that the increased funding is being used as wisely as possible.

Ultimately, we must rise to the unprecedented threats facing our Western lands, and any notion that the provisions contained in the Infrastructure Law fully address the enormity of these dangers must be rejected. As we speak, over 100 million acres of our Federal lands remain at high risk for wildfire and over a billion acres are at risk nationwide.

Even if the Forest Service can fully achieve the increased targets they have set, which is a big “if,” it would still not fully tackle the backlog of treatments needed on our Federal lands. We simply must do better. And with that, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentlewoman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, for 5 minutes. I suspect we are going to hear about Trillion Trees, but I am not sure. I am going to wait and see.

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

Mr. WESTERMAN. No Trillion Trees today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are going to talk about what we need to do with the trees that we have before we talk about planting more of them. And we are doing a miserable job with the trees that we have.

But Mr. Chairman, I wanted to first express my gratitude that today's hearing is a hybrid format. It gives us a chance to meet in person to discuss the very important wildfire crisis. And as you know, Committee Republicans have consistently opposed the Majority's decision to conduct Committee business virtually. And we welcome this return to the hearing room. Good to see you in person and other Members around the dais.

Mr. Chairman, you have rightly said that we need to take wildfire mitigation and resiliency seriously. And I have been saying that since I first came to Congress. Unfortunately, I don't think we have taken it seriously yet. Hopefully, we can keep working on that. And someday we will take it seriously, and we will see the results of it. I do want to echo Representative Herrell's concerns that the so-called Bipartisan Infrastructure Law reflects yet another example of Congress just throwing money at a problem, trying to put a Band-Aid on the symptoms instead of actually getting to the root problem of the problem and in blocking the scientifically supported forest management that is so desperately

needed. And with the wildfire and ecosystem restoration projects in this infrastructure package, it is sadly just the latest installment of increased funds to a system that is clearly broken.

Just 4 years ago, Congress delivered the Fire Funding Fix, which gave the Forest Service and DOI \$2.25 billion of new budget authority. We were promised that this was the primary obstacle to increasing the pace and scale of forest management. Yet, hazardous fuels treatments have remained stagnant. Like Representative Herrell mentioned, the Forest Service's budget has more than doubled, doubled, in 10 years, and yet that still is not enough.

Maybe we should look at changing the name of the Forest Service to the Fire Service. Even the forest testimony today calls the \$5.5 billion provided by the BIF a mere down payment on the actual funding that is needed. If we were serious about wildfire mitigation and resiliency and if the BIF was an attempt to fix that, you would think we would have had at least one hearing in the House about the so-called Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. The largest infrastructure spending in the history of the world—and not only did it not go through this Committee, it didn't go through the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. And the truth is that even as the budgets have continued to climb for our land management agencies, we are not seeing the type of paradigm shift that we all know needs to happen if we are ever going to truly tackle this historic crisis.

The primary culprits bogging down responsible management and recovery of our overgrown fire-prone forests have been and remain onerous regulatory burdens and the continued weaponization of our courts by activist environmental groups that litigate even the smallest management projects. I have said many times before, and I will keep saying it over and over, that the forest and nature could care less what we say in this room. They could care less how much money the Federal Government sends to an agency. They just keep growing, and the fires keep burning.

And as long as we are talking and throwing money at it and not addressing the root problem, that is what they are going to do. We are to the point that we have been for quite some time where we need a lot less talk or a little less talk and a lot more action. That is the only thing that is going to fix this wildfire crisis. Representative Herrell is correct in talking about the bills that we have introduced on the Republican side, the Resilient Federal Forest Act and other bills that look at the real problems that our forest land managers face.

With all this money, I am waiting to see some actions. But it is not going to happen with the environmentalists that come in and stop the projects. Until they quit suing, until we quit giving them the ability to hold up the management, there is no amount of money and no number of staff that are going to be able to fix the problem with our forests.

If people want to truly understand how bad our catastrophic wildfire crisis has gotten, look no further than our giant sequoias. Over a 15-month period from 2020 to 2021, we lost nearly one-fifth of the world's giant sequoias. Let me say that again. These iconic trees that are thousands of years old only grow in about 37,000

acres in California, and we lost 20 percent of them in a short period of time.

And these trees are the most fire-resilient species, probably, on the planet. Their bark is 2 feet thick at the base. They used to get 31 fires per century. But we started putting the fires out, and they only had three fires in the 20th century. And now the fires get in the crowns and wipe them out. That is unacceptable.

And if we don't act, we are going to lose all of our giant sequoias. They will grow back. We will have little spindly giant sequoia seedlings growing out there. But these iconic trees, we have to do something to fix that. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. I appreciate your patience in letting me go over a little bit, and I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The Ranking Member yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the distinguished Chairman of the Full Committee, Mr. Grijalva, for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you very much, Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member, for having me on the Subcommittee today. And I appreciate the Biden administration witnesses joining us as we work to implement the priorities of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that is an important and historic investment not only in the nation's infrastructure but in the natural world and the systems most impacted by climate change.

And that is why I decided to vote for it. And like any Member that voted for it, I didn't like everything in it. I wasn't crazy about the process. And I know some of my colleagues had legitimate concerns about passing it while so much was still up in the air and off the table. But at the end of the day, I voted to support it. And I did so because it was a tremendous benefit to my constituents.

And, of course, with that, an acknowledgment that more has to be done. We know that. But that is why this Committee has spent considerable time and effort on a legislative and oversight agenda that maybe, just maybe, will be enough to begin to address our climate, jobs, justice and public lands needs. That is why I also voted for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law when I had a chance. Unfortunately, not a single Republican on this Committee can say the same except, of course, for the late Dean of the House from Alaska, Representative Don Young, who, in all his wisdom, recognized that it was an important historic vote and that it would benefit directly his people in Alaska.

I expect we will hear the usual complaints that the bedrock environmental laws or endangered species protections are the real problem or outside environmental extremists who are clogging up the courts day after day and not allowing anything to be done. But we also know what is really deeply needed: Federal leadership in support of the long-term investments, working with states and other partners to make those investments as fruitful as possible, and to meaningfully address climate change, wildfire, and biodiversity.

That is what the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law does, and that is what the Protecting America's Wilderness Act does, and that is

what we will continue to do by any means that are available to us to promote that.

Without continued action on climate change, communities that rely on forests and public lands for their clean water, recreation, and wildlife habitat will continue to be at risk from climate impacts like drought in my state and wildfires in my state.

The record of the Natural Resources Committee, I think, speaks for itself. The hearing today is about making sure the Department of the Interior or the U.S. Forest Service are transparent, accountable, and guided by science in implementing what needs to be the historic down payment in our efforts to address climate change, wildfire, restoration, reforestation and the very critical workforce needs.

So, again, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, thank you and the witnesses, and I look forward to the testimony. I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Grijalva follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HON. RAÚL M. GRIJALVA, CHAIR, COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES

Thank you Chair Neguse and Ranking Member for having me in the Subcommittee today. I also appreciate the Biden administration witnesses joining us as you work to implement priorities for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Listen, I don't care what you call it, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, BIL, BIF, whatever—What matters is that Congress came together to pass a historic investment in the future of our nation's infrastructure, including the natural world and systems most impacted by climate change.

That is why I decided to vote for it. I didn't like everything in it. I didn't love the process. And I know some of my progressive colleagues had legitimate concerns about passing it while so much else was up in the air. But at the end of the day, I voted in support because I decided that it what would benefit my constituents.

Of course, there is an acknowledgement that more needs to be done. That is why this Committee has spent considerable time and effort on a legislative and oversight agenda that maybe, just maybe, will be enough to begin to address our climate, jobs, justice and public lands needs.

That is also why I voted for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law when I had the chance. Unfortunately, not a single Republican on this Committee can say the same. Except, of course, for the late Dean from Alaska, Rep. Don Young, who in all his wisdom recognized an important vote that would benefit the State of Alaska.

I expect we'll hear the usual complaints that bedrock environmental laws or endangered species protections are the real problem. But we all know that what is deeply needed: Federal leadership in support of long-term investments, working with states and other partners, to meaningfully address climate change, wildfire, and biodiversity.

That's what the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law does, that's what Protecting America's Wilderness Act does, and that's what we'll continue to do through any means available to us.

Without continued action on climate change, communities that rely on forests and public lands for clean water, recreation, and wildlife habitat will continue to be at risk from climate impacts like drought and wildfires.

The record of Natural Resources Committee Democrats speaks for itself.

This hearing today is about making sure the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service are transparent, accountable, and guided by science in implementing what needs to be a down payment in our efforts to address climate change, wildfire, restoration, reforestation, and workforce needs.

I'd like to again thank the Chair, Ranking Member, and witnesses, I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Chairman yields back. Now I'd like to turn to our witness panel. Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, they must limit their oral

statements to 5 minutes but that their entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

When you begin, the timer will begin. The lights in front of you will turn yellow when there is 1 minute left and then red when the time has expired. For any Members and witnesses joining remotely, it will turn orange when you have 1 minute remaining. And I recommend that you pin the timer so it remains visible.

After your testimony is complete, please remember to mute yourself on the microphone in front of you, and we will also allow the entire panel to testify before we proceed with questions. The Chair will now recognize our first witness, Mr. Jeff Rupert, Director of the Office of Wildland Fire at the U.S. Department of the Interior. Mr. Rupert, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JEFF RUPERT, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF WILDLAND FIRE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. RUPERT. Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Westerman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Department of the Interior's investments in wildfire management, ecosystem restoration, and resilient communities. The investments made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provide an unprecedented opportunity to reduce the impacts of wildfire on ecosystems and communities as well as modernizing our wildland fire workforce.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to these outcomes and look forward to our continued work together. Climate change continues to drive the devastating intersection of extreme heat, drought, and wildland fire danger across the United States, creating wildfires that move with the speed and intensity previously unseen.

Climate change has created a continuous fire year for our nation and American communities continue to bear the brunt of the resulting cycle of intensifying droughts, wildfires, and poor air quality. Funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law supports the Department's efforts to mitigate the impacts of these changes on wildland fire and better safeguard people, communities, and resources.

Current drought conditions and the drought outlook for much of the United States is very concerning. The NOAA Climate Prediction Center's seasonal drought outlook shows continued drought across nearly all of the West. And even in areas that have seen above normal rainfall this past winter, we may expect them to experience increased spring vegetation growth and then fast-moving wildfires during a dry, hot summer.

The United States has over 1 billion burnable acres that are at some level of risk from wildfire. More than 250 million of those acres are at high or very high wildfire hazard potential. And 7.1 million of those high/very high hazard acres are administered by Interior. Funding provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allows the Department to dramatically increase our efforts to reduce wildfire risk, improve community resiliency, and support post-fire recovery in these areas.

The additional investment in ecosystem restoration amplifies this support with efforts to restore ecological health, providing millions for restoration projects and supporting national revegetation efforts, including implementation of the National Seed Strategy. Today, I am happy to announce that yesterday, Interior released its 5-year monitoring, maintenance, and treatment plan, as required by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. DOI's plan provides a roadmap for increasing the pace and scale of fuels management and rehabilitation of lands damaged by wildfires with a focus on fire-prone Interior and Tribal Nation lands. It directly aligns with the USDA Forest Service 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy and identifies needed investments in science, technology, and tools to inform and empower stakeholders to work collaboratively.

Together, both blueprints facilitate a coordinated multi-jurisdictional approach to reducing wildfire risk over broad landscapes. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding also enables the Department to accelerate plans initiated in Fiscal Year 2021 to transform the firefighting workforce. Recent challenging fire seasons have focused attention on the increasing threat of wildfire to people, communities, and the natural environment.

Yesterday's fire season is today's fire year. Shifting the fire workforce toward a more permanent, full-time appointment supports career growth, increases retention, and more experienced and knowledgeable firefighters. In turn, this will have a substantial long-lasting effect in support of a more robust, sound management, decision making, and safety for firefighters and the public.

The Department maintains strong relationships with states, Tribal Nations, other Federal agencies, and local governments and stakeholders. We remain committed to work in partnership to address wildland fire management issues and manage wildfire risk.

Our work with elected officials, tribes, and organizations, such as the Western Governors' Association and National Association of Counties, are key to implementing sound principles and wildlife fire management before, during, and after wildfires. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also authorizes establishment of the Wildland Fire Mitigation Management Commission announced in December 2021.

It will play a key role in recommending Federal policies and strategies to more effectively prevent, mitigate, suppress, and manage wildfires, including the rehabilitation of burned areas. The Commission is in the process of reviewing applications for membership from individuals with a broad spectrum of knowledge and interest to address wildfire impacts to our nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss these important investments and partnerships, ecosystem restoration, and the well-being of our wildland firefighters. This concludes my statement. I am happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rupert follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JEFFERY RUPERT, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF WILDLAND FIRE,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Department of the Interior's (DOI) implementation of the investments in the Wildland Fire

Management Program contained in Public Law 117-58, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

President Biden signed the BIL on November 15, 2021, making a once-in-a-generation investment in the Nation's infrastructure and economic competitiveness. This landmark investment will help rebuild America's critical infrastructure, tackle the climate crisis, advance environmental justice, and drive the creation of good-paying jobs. By addressing long overdue improvements and strengthening our resilience to the changing climate, this investment in our communities across the country will grow the economy sustainably and equitably so everyone gets ahead for decades to come.

The Biden-Harris Administration's strong commitment to supporting the wildland firefighting workforce, coupled with the provisions in the BIL, represent an historic investment in Federal wildland fire management efforts, and DOI's Wildland Fire Management Program. The BIL provides significant investments in wildfire mitigation work and post-fire rehabilitation efforts that will be integral to the restoration of ecosystems and important landscape services like reliable and clean water supplies, clean air, biodiversity and productivity, healthy native species habitat, and recreation opportunities.

We appreciate the Committee's interest in the Department's plans and priorities for implementing the BIL.

Drought

Current drought conditions and drought outlooks for much of the United States looks very concerning for communities and virtually every resource dependent on water or precipitation. The U.S. Drought Monitor shows some slight improvement in parts of the Eastern U.S., but moderate degradation across many areas of the West. The NOAA Climate Prediction Center U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook (March 17, 2022) shows continuation of drought across nearly all the West, except for the coastal Pacific Northwest and a part of the Northern Rocky Mountains.

Seasonal outlooks from the Center show that warmer than normal temperatures are also likely for a good part of the West.

Wildland vegetation has not yet recovered from a long-term drought across much of the West, where we expect to see increased drought stress and mortality in shrubs and trees. One concern is that parts of the West that had seen above normal rainfall for part of the past winter, might see germination and growth of grasses that stop growing into late spring and summer, and become fuel to spread fast moving wildfires.

Climate Change

Drought conditions and other climate influences on wildfire that we have seen in recent years are consistent with scientific descriptions of climate change, including from the U.S. Global Change Research Program and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (UN). For example, we have seen more intense precipitation for shorter periods of the winter, longer and warmer growing seasons accompanied by drought, and earlier snowmelt in higher elevations. We are beginning to see changes in vegetation itself, driven by drought and insect infestations and in some instances, shorter periods of time between high severity wildfires. These factors have contributed to increasingly devastating, intense, and historic fire seasons in recent years.

In the near term, wildfires near communities, watersheds, critical resources, and infrastructure are of greatest concern with climate-induced wildfire changes, including elevated risk to human health and the environment from unmanaged smoke. However, over the longer term, wildfires that change vegetation types, and wildfires burning in peat lands and tundra, may have longer lasting effects that ultimately contribute to further warming, compounded wildfire risk and greater carbon emissions.

Climate change is creating longer fire seasons and American communities continue to bear the brunt of the resulting cycle of intensifying droughts, wildfires, poor air quality, and flooding. Wildfires can undercut the many benefits and services we receive from lands managed by DOI, including those held in trust for Tribal nations, such as foraging, hunting and fishing, clean water, clean air, wildlife, recreational opportunities, and cultural resources. Additionally, wildfires threaten drinking water and cause billions of dollars in damages to homes and infrastructure.

Managing wildfire risk is key to the protection and stewardship of these federal lands and honors our trust responsibilities and special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities. Addressing this challenge will require us to focus the significant investment of resources, to scalable risk reduction strategies informed by the best available science around changing climate

conditions and shifting demographics. As we all know, wildfire knows no boundaries and solutions will require collaboration and cooperation. The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy's goals of creating resilient landscapes, promoting fire-adapted communities, and ensuring a safe and effective wildfire response, culminates in the vision of a Nation able to live with wildland fire.

The United States has over one billion acres at some level of risk from wildfire. More than 250 million of those acres are at high or very-high hazard potential, and 7.1 million acres of lands administered by DOI are identified as having a very-high or high likelihood of exposure to wildfires. To address this, the Department is putting people first by working with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to recognize the efforts of our Federal wildland firefighters who respond to ignitions, implement fuels treatments to reduce the risk from wildfires before they start, and administer post-fire rehabilitation efforts to reduce further damage from severe wildfire events and set these landscapes back on the path to recovery.

As part of this effort, with support from the BIL, the Department in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service, Tribal Nations, and other Federal and non-Federal partners, will increase fuels treatment accomplishments that reduce risk to adjacent communities and watersheds, and that align with the Department's Fuels Management program objectives:

- Integration with Resource and Land Management activities.
- Stewardship-Based projects with shared stewardship values and joint, mutually agreed upon priorities coordinated with partners and stakeholders.
- Geographic Landscape-Based projects that contribute to a broad-scale strategy to achieve mutually agreed upon management goals and objectives that are coordinated locally.
- Outcome Based projects that protect, maintain, and improve resiliency to wildfire; mitigate significant wildfire risk to Department and Tribal values; protect, maintain, or improve resiliency to wildfire; and meet bureaus' statutory obligations for wildland fire management responsibilities.

Over the past decade, the Department has invested more than \$2 billion in pre- and post-hazardous fuels management treatments to protect communities and ecosystems. Maintaining this investment in areas where the Department has successfully reduced wildfire risk is an important component of the Department's long-term success. As the Department completes treatments in new areas we will continue to protect and maintain these investments in pre-wildfire risk reduction, post-fire hazard mitigation, and ecosystem restoration.

Ecosystem Restoration & BIL Overview

Under the BIL, the Department will dramatically expand its efforts to reduce wildfire risk, improve community resiliency to wildfire, prepare for and respond to harmful wildfires, and support post-fire recovery, including in communities that have traditionally been overlooked.

The BIL provides more than \$5 billion to both DOI and the USDA Forest Service Wildland Fire Management programs over the next five years for coordinated efforts for managing wildfire risk. Of that amount, nearly \$1.5 billion is provided to DOI, including:

- \$255 million to support science, technology, training, and workforce reforms including increased pay and mental health and safety programs for firefighters.
- \$325 million to support recovery after a fire. These actions will help mitigate the damaging effects of wildfires and set landscapes on a path toward natural recovery and climate resilience.
- \$878 million to manage fuels and mitigate wildfire risk before a wildfire occurs. This work will protect vulnerable communities from wildfire while preparing our natural landscapes for a changing climate.

The BIL also provides the Department \$905 million for ecosystem restoration. These resources will be targeted to projects nationally to build climate resilience, restore and connect core habitats as well as build partnerships and leverage strategic conservation plans. The ecosystem restoration funds include several areas where we are coordinating internally and with the Department of Agriculture across Wildland Fire Management and Ecosystem Restoration programs and see opportunities to amplify our efforts such as \$70 million to Interior to support a national revegetation effort including implementation of the National Seed Strategy.

The BIL also provides \$50 million to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for sagebrush ecosystem conservation. Priority investments for those resources include complementary efforts of protecting sagebrush habitat against the spread of the invasive annual grasses and the destructive wildfires they fuel as well as restoring mesic (wet) habitats to combat the effects of extreme drought.

Overall, this funding will directly create private sector, state, Tribal, and local jobs in forestry, rangelands, land and water management and related industries. This includes opportunities to supply materials and carry out restoration work, conduct science, as well as generate economic ripple effects as those new hires spend their money in the local economy. Restored, fire-resilient ecosystems will also create jobs in the tourism, outdoor recreation, and commercial fishing sectors, as well as the many other sectors that depend on plants, animals, and healthy landscapes.

Workforce Reform

In coordination with the Department of Agriculture and the Office of Personnel Management, the Department is developing a new wildland firefighter classification series and pay and compensation reforms. The goals of this reform include:

- Advancing the President's commitment to ensuring that wildland firefighters receive a livable wage and pay that is commensurate with the arduous work that they perform. DOI in coordination with the Forest Service is taking steps again this year to pay firefighters no less than \$15/hour. Additionally, both agencies are working with the Office of Personnel Management to develop a wildland firefighter occupational series and increase base pay, as directed by BIL. The agencies are also exploring a long-term solution to increase future compensation to better support the contemporary wildland firefighter workforce. Continuing to convert temporary wildland firefighters and support positions to permanent, full-time positions available year-round for fire response and risk mitigation activities. The Department and the U.S. Forest Service began conversions in FY 2021 and will continue converting wildland firefighters with the support provided in BIL.
- The Department's Wildland Fire Management Program is coordinating with the U.S. Forest Service to establish programs and capacity to recognize and address mental health needs of firefighters and ensure access to appropriate resources. The Department is immediately focused on further defining firefighter mental health needs and identifying evidence based primary prevention and early intervention strategies. Next, adequate Critical Incident Stress Management response capacity will be established in every bureau. Additional responder-tailored mental health support services that will be prioritized and made available through interagency national contract or contracts.

Partnerships

The Department has established and maintains strong relationships with states, Tribal Nations, local governments, other Federal agencies, and stakeholders. Together, we continue to work in partnership to address wildland fire management issues and manage wildfire risk. Our work with elected officials, tribes, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Western Governors Association and the National Association of Counties are key to implementing sound principles of wildland fire management and prioritizing post-fire restoration needs across landscapes.

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) remains a vital partner and a key player in the implementation of BIL. Through WFLC, the Department is continuing work with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Forest Service to assess the impacts of smoke on air quality and public health from wildfires and prescribed fires to inform future land management and wildland fire management strategies. BIL funding provides an opportunity to expand this innovation and implement additional smoke exposure mitigation activities. The Department continues to partner with WFLC to better coordinate management activities across boundaries and jurisdictions to implement the Cohesive Strategy and support its member agencies and organizations to better address the challenges and needs of underserved communities.

Approximately 6.5 million acres of land managed by the Department are adjacent or near Tribal land. The proximity and interconnectedness necessitate close communication and collaboration on wildland fire management. We have solidified our relationship with tribes by establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC). The ITC is a non-profit consortium of 54 member Tribes. All are dedicated to improving the oversight and management of resources

of interest to Native American communities. Under the memorandum, the Department and ITC commit to work collaboratively on reducing wildland fire risk and mitigating post-wildfire impacts.

Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission

In December 2021, USDA, DOI, and the Department of Homeland Security through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced the establishment of a Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission. Authorized under the BIL, the Commission will play a key role in recommending federal policies and strategies to more effectively prevent, mitigate, suppress, and manage wildland fires, including the rehabilitation of affected lands.

The commission is reviewing applications for membership from volunteers from diverse backgrounds, with a specific focus on members who represent non-federal interests as required by the BIL. Membership will include state, local, Tribal, territory, and non-government partners with experience in preventing, mitigating, and managing wildland fires and the wildland-urban interface.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss these important investments in partnerships, ecosystem restoration, and the mental health and well-being of our wildland fire professionals. These investments are integral in supporting the Department's efforts to meaningfully address wildfire risk and respond to the complexities of longer and more intense wildfire seasons.

This concludes my written statement. I am happy to answer any questions.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO JEFF RUPERT, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF
WILDLAND FIRE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Questions Submitted by Representative Porter

Question 1. How much money did DOI spend on reimbursement to state and local authorities for firefighting resources through intergovernmental agreements or other mechanisms during FY22? What does DOI project to spend in FY23? Please provide information disaggregated by State and Region.

Answer. The Department of the Interior (Department) spent \$90.5 million on reimbursements to state and local authorities for firefighting resources in fiscal year (FY) 2021 and \$13.5 million through the first two quarters of FY 2022. These amounts include direct reimbursements to state and local governments from the Department's Wildland Fire Management program. Intergovernmental agreements with other Federal agencies, Tribal Nations, state and local governments, and private partners improve the interoperability and efficiency of wildfire response by facilitating the coordination and exchange of resources.

Approximately 7.1 million acres of land administered by the Department and Tribal Nations are identified as having a very high or high likelihood of exposure to wildfires. (See, www.fs.usda.gov/nnrs/projects/firesheds-and-fireshed-registry). Additionally, climate change is contributing to more frequent and severe wildfire activity. FY 2023 reimbursement spending will be heavily influenced by fire activity over the next several months and is thus inherently unpredictable.

Please refer to Attachment 1 for total reimbursements to state and local authorities for FY 2021 and for the first two quarters for FY 2022 disaggregated by state and region (Geographic Area). The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC), located at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, has divided the United States and Alaska into ten Geographic Areas for the purpose of incident management and mobilization of resources (people, aircraft, and ground equipment). These Geographic Areas facilitate efficient fire management activities to ensure efficient operational wildfire response and cost-effective sharing of resources.

Question 2. How much money did DOI spend contracting for firefighting resources during FY22? How much does DOI project to spend in FY23? Please provide information disaggregated by State and Region.

Answer. The Department spent a total of \$166 million on contracting for firefighting resources in FY 2021 and \$102.6 million through the first two quarters of FY 2022. These amounts include direct contracting costs from the Department's Wildland Fire Management program. As discussed above, given the very high or high likelihood of Department and Tribal Nation lands exposure to wildfire and the

impacts from climate change, the Department generally anticipates that the total contracting costs for firefighter resources for FY 2022 and for FY 2023 will be in general alignment with total contracting costs for firefighting resources that were incurred in FY 2021.

Please refer to Attachment 2 for the total contracting costs for firefighting resources for FY 2021 and for the first two quarters for FY 2022 disaggregated by state and region (Geographic Area). The National Geographic Area Coordinating Group, located at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, has divided the United States and Alaska into ten Geographic Areas for the purpose of incident management and mobilization of resources (people, aircraft, and ground equipment). These Geographic Areas facilitate efficient fire management activities to ensure efficient operational wildfire response and cost-effective sharing of resources among public agencies and Tribes.

Question 3. DOI's Wildland Fire Management Initial Spend Plan states that "Beginning October 1, 2021 (no deadline for completion set in the law): DOI and USDA Forest Service will:

- Seek to convert not fewer than 1,000 seasonal wildland firefighting positions to permanent year-round positions that are full time and reduce hazardous fuels on Federal land not fewer than 900 hours per year (each position);*
- Increase the salary of wildland firefighters by an amount equal to the lesser of \$20,000 or 50 percent of base salary if the DOI and USDA Secretaries and the OPM Director determine that a position is in a geographic area where it is difficult to recruit or retain Federal wildland firefighters."*

(3a). How many seasonal employees have DOI and USDA Forest Service, respectively, converted to permanent year-round positions since the enactment of IIJA?

Answer. To date, the Department had completed approximately 90 percent of the conversions with the funding that was appropriated in FY 2021 to begin its wildland firefighter workforce transformation. This equates to a total of 498 of 568 total targeted positions for conversion. The majority of the salaries and expenses funding authorized in Section 40803(c)(2) of IIJA is being used to implement the supplemental pay increases in FYs 2022 and 2023. The FY 2023 President's Budget requests additional funding to bolster firefighter pay, convert more firefighters to permanent positions, and increase the number of wildland fire management personnel.

(3b). How are DOI and USDA determining geographic areas for the purposes of increasing the salaries of Wildland Firefighters? What are the average salary increase for wildland firefighters since the enactment of the IIJA, by GS level and geographic area?

Answer. The Department and the USDA Forest Service are committed to providing a fair and livable wage to federal employees, and have ensured that no firefighter makes less than \$15 an hour, consistent with President Biden's direction last year. DOI has worked closely with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to coordinate the temporary supplemental pay increase included in the IIJA to ensure implementation of the law as intended and in alignment with Federal personnel standards and guidelines. This includes an analysis comparing federal, state, municipal, and private firefighter wages to help determine recruitment and retention difficulty across geographic areas, as well as assessing DOI staff across GACCs to determine the appropriate increases in firefighter base salaries. Based on this analysis, it was determined that it is difficult to recruit and retain wildland firefighters in every geographic area. Please refer to Attachment 3 for information regarding the average salary increase in pay for wildland firefighters by GS level and geographic area.

Question 4. DOI's Wildland Fire Management Initial Spend Plan states that "DOI and USDA Forest Service are coordinating with OPM on an analysis to propose a special rate request for firefighters?"

(4a). Is this analysis complete? If so, please provide the Subcommittee with a copy. If not, when will it be completed?

Answer. President Biden recently announced the temporary supplemental pay increases for wildland firefighters that are authorized by IIJA. The Administration is continuing to assess long-term firefighter workforce reforms, including a potential special salary rate with OPM, and looks forward to working with Congress on these important investments as they continue to evolve.

(4b). What specific criteria is/was DOI and USDA Forest Service using to determine whether to make a special rate request to OPM for wildland firefighters?

Answer. The Administration remains to committed to a long-term solution to addressing firefighter pay. As discussed above, the Department is working with its Federal partners to develop potential long-term reforms. As part of this effort, we are assessing data in consideration of a potential special salary rate request for wildland firefighters. This includes criteria such as agencies' current staffing status; cross-sector salary cost comparisons; recruitment and retention challenges; assessment of the broader labor market; interaction with other pay flexibilities or other non-pay solutions; and estimates of the full staffing costs.

Attachment 1. Department of the Interior Reimbursements to State and Local Authorities for Firefighting Resources, by State and Region, FY 2021 and FY 2022, Quarters 1 and 2

State	FY 2021	FY 2022 (Q1 and Q2)	Geographic Area	FY 2021	FY 2022 (Q1 and Q2)
Alaska	\$8,928,926	\$669,117	Alaska	\$8,928,926	\$669,117
Arizona	\$1,408,905	\$150,768	Eastern Area	\$630,648	\$181,671
California	\$17,359,863	\$6,379,291	Great Basin	\$17,387,116	\$1,489,248
Colorado	\$3,931,892	\$552,452	North Ops	\$7,817,594	\$2,871,831
Florida	\$715,810	\$141,857	Northern Rockies	\$13,553,781	\$1,771,329
Hawaii	\$5,656	\$1,150	Northwest	\$17,341,363	\$1,174,106
Idaho	\$9,154,449	\$930,336	Rocky Mountain	\$6,819,152	\$1,535,098
Indiana	\$33,315	\$0	South Ops	\$9,547,925	\$3,508,610
Iowa	\$1,235	\$0	Southern Area	\$4,608,327	\$155,864
Kansas	\$608,568	\$85,797	Southwest	\$3,865,230	\$192,590
Kentucky	\$11,377	\$0	Grand Total	\$90,500,062	\$13,549,464
Maine	\$562	-\$359			
Maryland	\$3,474	\$0			
Michigan	\$1,598	\$0			
Minnesota	\$574,426	\$182,626			
Missouri	\$8,031	-\$933			
Montana	\$10,373,349	\$1,455,015			
Nebraska	\$61,005	\$178,381			
Nevada	\$2,328,283	\$202,780			
New Hampshire	\$579	\$0			
New Jersey	\$1,745	\$0			
New Mexico	\$465,152	\$35,640			
North Carolina	\$7,624	\$0			
North Dakota	\$67,919	\$0			
Ohio	\$4,856	\$0			
Oklahoma	\$3,324	\$2,007			
Oregon	\$9,911,540	\$440,657			
Pennsylvania	\$633	\$0			
South Carolina	\$1,515	\$0			
South Dakota	\$612,738	\$409,231			
Tennessee	\$3,459	\$0			
Texas	\$5,856,391	\$18,182			
Utah	\$9,016,897	\$672,446			
Washington	\$7,429,823	\$733,449			
Wisconsin	\$194	\$337			
Wyoming	\$1,604,949	\$309,237			
Grand Total	\$90,500,062	\$13,549,464			

Attachment 2. Department of the Interior Expenditures for Contracting for Firefighting Resources, by State and Region, FY 2021 and FY 2022, Quarters 1 and 2.

State	FY 2021	FY 2022 (Q1 and Q2)	Geographic Area	FY 2021	FY 2022 (Q1 and Q2)
Alabama	\$1,765.82	\$0.00	Alaska	\$580,987.75	\$65,587.05
Alaska	\$580,987.75	\$65,587.05	Eastern Area	\$426,693.72	\$180,742.53
Arizona	\$11,407,544.33	\$617,315.06	Great Basin	\$32,221,866.94	\$2,472,225.63
Arkansas	\$2,576,954.40	\$1,184.20	North Ops	\$8,225,941.64	\$26,039,549.42
California	\$18,264,768.20	\$57,864,790.19	Northern Rockies	\$22,084,002.64	\$7,139,472.96
Colorado	\$13,774,133.75	\$638,542.95	Northwest	\$40,262,113.32	\$26,188,738.30
Florida	\$402,454.32	\$13,048.98	Rocky Mountain	\$17,597,803.04	\$1,373,313.23
Georgia	\$2,704.77	\$0.00	South Ops	\$10,045,622.51	\$31,825,634.60
Hawaii	\$6,795.95	\$393.83	Southern Area	\$3,488,970.08	\$61,364.11
Idaho	\$17,804,327.98	\$2,474,934.23	Southwest	\$12,305,175.94	\$656,314.91
Illinois	\$1,344.10	\$0.00	Other*	\$18,805,683.64	\$6,576,281.29
Indiana	\$5,440.09	\$0.00	Grand Total	\$166,044,861.22	\$102,579,224.03
Iowa	\$28,254.24	\$0.00			
Kansas	\$18,901.68	\$703.00			
Louisiana	\$630.52	\$0.00			
Massachusetts	\$1,100.67	\$0.00			
Michigan	\$90,065.59	\$23,264.96			
Minnesota	\$281,650.08	\$114,781.28			
Mississippi	\$1,203.43	\$0.00			
Missouri	\$2,498.51	\$13,035.51			
Montana	\$15,717,681.87	\$6,266,582.43			
Nebraska	\$32,618.32	\$55,360.00			
Nevada	\$11,686,037.42	\$461,018.96			
New Hampshire	\$2,920.16	\$0.00			
New Mexico	\$744,439.23	\$32,866.09			
North Carolina	\$21,508.74	\$670.10			
North Dakota	\$312,849.26	\$31,412.89			
Ohio	\$71.34	\$0.00			
Oklahoma	\$133,600.97	\$34,554.12			
Oregon	\$24,526,310.68	\$4,603,437.99			
Pennsylvania	\$460.00	\$0.00			
South Carolina	\$6,974.80	\$0.00			
South Dakota	\$1,297,906.97	\$176,430.87			
Tennessee	\$39,523.01	\$0.00			
Texas	\$450,565.82	\$18,040.47			
Utah	\$8,784,973.05	\$377,750.08			
Vermont	\$631.90	\$0.00			
Virginia	\$4,275.86	\$0.00			
Washington	\$15,735,802.64	\$21,585,300.31			
West Virginia	-\$0.72	\$2.04			
Wisconsin	\$12,257.76	\$29,658.74			
Wyoming	\$2,474,242.32	\$502,276.41			
Other*	\$18,805,683.64	\$6,576,281.29			
Grand Total	\$166,044,861.22	\$102,579,224.03			

* Other costs are associated with expenditures that cross multiple geographic areas, multiple wildfires, or may be national in scope.

Attachment 3. Average Salary Increase in Pay for Wildland Firefighters by GS Level and Geographic Area.

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Alaska	03	50.0%
Alaska	04	49.3%
Alaska	05	47.6%
Alaska	06	43.3%
Alaska	07	37.3%
Alaska	08	32.9%
Alaska	09	29.1%
Alaska	10	27.7%
Alaska	11	25.0%
Alaska	12	20.6%
Alaska	13	16.7%
Alaska	14	14.5%
Alaska	15	12.2%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
California	03	50.0%
California	04	50.0%
California	05	49.2%
California	06	46.3%
California	07	38.9%
California	08	33.0%
California	09	29.7%
California	10	31.8%
California	11	25.3%
California	12	22.8%
California	13	17.3%
California	14	14.7%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Eastern	03	50.0%
Eastern	04	49.9%
Eastern	05	48.7%
Eastern	06	42.0%
Eastern	07	36.1%
Eastern	09	30.8%
Eastern	11	25.0%
Eastern	12	20.9%
Eastern	13	16.4%
Eastern	14	13.5%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Great Basin	03	50.0%
Great Basin	04	50.0%
Great Basin	05	50.0%
Great Basin	06	48.5%
Great Basin	07	41.5%
Great Basin	08	36.7%
Great Basin	09	31.4%
Great Basin	10	32.1%
Great Basin	11	27.3%
Great Basin	12	23.0%
Great Basin	13	18.9%
Great Basin	14	15.8%
Great Basin	15	13.1%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Northern Rockies	02	50.0%
Northern Rockies	03	50.0%
Northern Rockies	04	50.0%
Northern Rockies	05	49.1%
Northern Rockies	06	47.2%
Northern Rockies	07	40.4%
Northern Rockies	08	36.5%
Northern Rockies	09	31.5%
Northern Rockies	11	26.9%
Northern Rockies	12	22.2%
Northern Rockies	13	19.8%
Northern Rockies	14	16.8%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Northwest	03	50.0%
Northwest	04	50.0%
Northwest	05	49.7%
Northwest	06	47.2%
Northwest	07	40.7%
Northwest	08	36.1%
Northwest	09	31.3%
Northwest	10	29.5%
Northwest	11	26.7%
Northwest	12	21.7%
Northwest	13	18.2%
Northwest	14	14.6%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Rocky Mountain	02	50.0%
Rocky Mountain	03	50.0%
Rocky Mountain	04	50.0%
Rocky Mountain	05	49.8%
Rocky Mountain	06	47.1%
Rocky Mountain	07	39.8%
Rocky Mountain	08	36.6%
Rocky Mountain	09	31.8%
Rocky Mountain	11	26.6%
Rocky Mountain	12	22.6%
Rocky Mountain	13	18.3%
Rocky Mountain	14	16.1%
Rocky Mountain	15	13.8%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Southern	03	50.0%
Southern	04	50.0%
Southern	05	48.6%
Southern	06	46.2%
Southern	07	39.4%
Southern	08	36.4%
Southern	09	31.9%
Southern	10	31.4%
Southern	11	26.2%
Southern	12	21.6%
Southern	13	19.3%
Southern	14	14.5%

GACC	GS Level	% of Base Salary Increase
Southwest	02	50.0%
Southwest	03	50.0%
Southwest	04	50.0%
Southwest	05	48.8%
Southwest	06	45.4%
Southwest	07	39.8%
Southwest	08	35.6%
Southwest	09	31.2%
Southwest	11	26.6%
Southwest	12	21.7%
Southwest	13	18.8%
Southwest	14	16.3%

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you, Mr. Rupert.

The Chair now recognizes Ms. Jaelith Hall-Rivera, a Deputy Chief of State and Private Forestry at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Ms. Hall-Rivera, you have 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF Jaelith Hall-Rivera, Deputy Chief,
State and Private Forestry, U.S. Department of
Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington, DC**

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Great. Thank you so much Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Herrell, and members of this Subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. I deeply appreciate Congress' passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, or BIL, which provides a significant down payment on the work the Forest Service intends to accomplish under the 10-year strategy to confront the wildfire crisis.

The Agency recognizes that the American people depend on the nation's forests and grasslands for their social, economic, and personal well-being. All the benefits that the nation's forests provide are at risk, as nearly a quarter of the contiguous United States is currently in a high to moderate wildfire condition.

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed what has become a now familiar pattern—bigger and more destructive wildfires that are extremely challenging and costly to suppress. We have experienced catastrophic fire seasons in the last 2 years alone, devastating communities and destroying resources in their wake. They threaten human health, water quality, homes, jobs, local economies, communities, and infrastructure. They also threaten key ecological values, including carbon storage, species habitat, soil stability, and watershed functions, in some cases, even resulting in long-term deforestation.

We are experiencing and are prepared for another long and arduous fire year in 2022. In fact, as we know, there was already significant fire activity occurring in the South, and we went nationally to preparedness Level 2 last week. Much of the West remains in drought. A high level of hazardous fuels across the landscape and the expanding wildland urban interface indicate we will face an extremely challenging fire year.

Our priority, first and foremost, is to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the fire management community and the public we serve. The BIL supports the Forest Service's efforts to confront this crisis by investing in hazardous fuels reduction, fire risk mitigation across boundaries, technological advancements, and fire-fighter compensation.

We are currently working on sending this money out to the field to begin work in high-priority landscapes to reduce wildfire risk to communities and watersheds. The over a billion dollars in funding targeted toward hazardous fuels reduction in Section 40803 of the BIL will allow us to begin implementing the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. This funding also helps us to build new markets by providing financial assistance to facilities that purchase and process byproducts for ecosystem restoration projects from the \$400 million that was authorized under Section 40804 of the law.

The Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program will provide financial assistance using the billion dollars under Section 40803(f) to be focused on at-risk communities to help them develop

community wildfire protection plans and to implement those prevention and mitigation activities that are outlined in those plans.

Hiring and retaining firefighters in increasingly long and complex fire years is a challenge that we all take seriously. Section 40803(d) of the BIL calls for the classification of the new and unique wildland firefighter series, provides funding for short-term salary increases, provides the ability for us and the Department of the Interior to convert a thousand seasonal firefighters into permanent fire managers and provides us the ability to increase investments in programs that focus on mental health, resilience, and well-being.

USDA, in collaboration with its partners at Interior and the Office of Personnel Management, is working to implement these classification, pay, and staffing conversion provisions. The Infrastructure Law was a significant step in the right direction in terms of wildland firefighter compensation. And, once again, I thank you for your work on that. But we need to continue to work together to find a permanent solution to increasing our wildland firefighters' pay and making other system changes that ensure that we can continue to support our firefighters and ensure that this is a career that others will pursue in the future.

The Infrastructure Bill also made investments in wildfire detection through sensors, cameras, and satellite platforms. The Forest Service has strong partnerships with NOAA, NASA, and the Department of Defense to continue using the best remote technology to detect and access wildfires on the landscape. Once again, I thank you for your investments and your interest in wildfire management, ecosystem restoration, and resilient communities. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hall-Rivera follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAELETH HALL-RIVERA, DEPUTY CHIEF FOR STATE &
PRIVATE FORESTRY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE-FOREST SERVICE
AND
BRIAN FEREBEE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Thank you for inviting us to testify about the Forest Service's implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). We deeply appreciate Congress's passage of the BIL, which provides a significant down payment on the work we intend to accomplish under the 10-year Strategy to Confront the Wildfire Crisis. Of the \$5.5 billion in funding provided by the BIL for the Forest Service, about \$3 billion will be invested over five years to reduce the risk of wildland fire to communities and restore ecosystems.

Value of Forests to People

Since before America's founding, the health and productivity of the continent's lands and waters supported an abundance of human life and activity. Native peoples built some of the most enduring and advanced civilizations on Earth and are the original caretakers of all the beautiful lands across our nation. Traditional Ecological Knowledge continues to be at the heart of sustainable agriculture, environmentally sound fire management, and good land stewardship practices.

Today, people continue to depend on the nation's forests and grasslands for their social, economic, and personal well-being. National forests and grasslands are critical for climate resilience, providing benefits that include carbon storage, habitat and connectivity for wildlife, and clean air and water. For example, nationwide, more than 60 million people living in 3,400 communities across 36 states depend on the national forests and grasslands for their drinking water.

Americans also rely on their national forests and grasslands for outdoor recreation, cultural and spiritual connections, and respite. The benefits include physical

exercise and all the mental and other health improvements that come with it. In 2020, the National Forest System had 168 million visitors, equivalent to more than 50% of the United States population. For local communities, this is where they live and gather. Outdoor activities and scenery give communities a sense of identity and place, adding to their quality of life.

The National Forest System is also a tremendous source of jobs and economic opportunities for hundreds of thousands of Americans. In 2020, the National Forest System (NFS) supported more than 370,000 jobs and contributed more than \$35 billion to our nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2020, 66 percent of the NFS GDP contribution (\$23.3 billion) was associated with direct use of forest and grassland resources, including hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, energy and mineral development, and forest products. Of this, recreation visitor use supported about 168,300 jobs and contributed \$13.5 billion. In addition, 31 percent of the GDP contribution (\$10.9 billion) was tied to resource management investments, such as construction and maintenance of infrastructure, firefighting, ecosystem restoration, research and development, fuels treatments, and Job Corps. Finally, 3 percent of the GDP contribution (\$872 million) was derived from payments to states and counties to support schools, roads, and other government services.

All this and more are at risk on forests and grasslands nationwide.

The Risks to Forests

Nearly a quarter of the contiguous U.S. is currently in a high to moderate wildfire condition. Over the last two decades, we have witnessed what has become a now familiar pattern: bigger and more destructive wildfires that are extremely challenging and costly to suppress due to over 100 years of fire suppression, climate change, and expanding Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). We have experienced back-to-back catastrophic fire seasons in the last two years, devastating communities and destroying resources in their wake. Big destructive wildfires threaten human health, water quality, homes, jobs, local economies, communities, and infrastructure. They also threaten key ecological values, including carbon storage, species habitat, soil stability, and watershed function; and in some cases, even result in long-term deforestation.

Conditions are only expected to worsen as the climate continues to change, and development in the WUI continues unabated. Vast areas of the West and across the country are at risk from huge wildfires that can quickly spread 10 to 30 square miles or more, burning through multiple landownerships, forest types, and communities.

This growing wildfire crisis created the need for a new land management strategy—one designed to support strategic management and restoration of millions of acres of land in high-risk areas to protect forest health, ecosystem and watershed function, and human infrastructure. The need for increased pace and scale of restoration necessitates a holistic response in partnership with the Department of the Interior (DOI) and other Federal agencies, State and Tribal governments, communities, industries, organizations, and private landowners.

This collaborative response needs to be a paradigm shift from small-scale, independently managed treatments to strategic, science-based landscape-scale treatments that cross boundaries and meet the scale of the problem, starting initially with those places critically at risk. It also needs to be paired with thoughtful reforms to address growth into the WUI and the growing climate crisis.

The Wildfire Crisis Strategy

Our 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy would increase science-based fuels treatments by up to four times previous treatment levels, especially in those areas most at risk. Fuels treatments by the Forest Service together with partners have made a difference over the years. But the scale of treatments has been outmatched by the rapid increase in the scale and severity of wildfires as climate change accelerates.

This strategy calls for treating up to 20 million additional acres of National Forest System lands over the coming decade, and working with partners, including colleagues at the Department of the Interior, to treat up to 30 million additional acres on adjoining lands of multiple landownerships, while building a long-term maintenance plan. The intent for these treatments is to reduce the trajectory of wildfire risk to people, municipal water sources, communities, and natural resources, and restore fire-adapted landscapes so they are more resilient.

Active management rooted in sound science and ecological principles will remain a key tool in this work. We are using every tool and authority we have to protect and improve the health of America's forests. The tools we have include, but are not limited to, prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, targeted grazing, Good Neighbor

Authority agreements, Tribal Forest Protection Act agreements, and stewardship contracts.

It will be imperative to use fire itself for fuel and forest management in our western landscapes because many of those ecosystems evolved with fire. Fire is an essential and highly effective fuel treatment to reduce wildfire risk and can have ecological benefits for many western forest types.

Connecting landscape risk reduction and resilience with community risk reduction and resilience at the necessary scale is a critical part of the paradigm shift. Our tools for these connections include community fire prevention programs, community wildfire protection plans (CWPP), and Firewise practices for homes and communities to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

I want to stress that the additional acres treated under the 10-year strategy will be over and above regular appropriations. That means the work that we have historically accomplished—in timber production, recreation, mining, wildlife habitat management, and more—will continue. We look forward to working with Congress on the President's Fiscal Year 2023 budget and beyond to ensure sufficient resources are in place to deliver on the 10-year strategy.

BIL and the Wildfire Crisis Strategy

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides a down payment to begin the critical work outlined in our 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. To achieve the collective impact that our forests and communities need, we must build a coalition to work across land management jurisdictions, leverage diverse capacities, and build broad public and community support for the work at the scale necessary to make a difference. This includes work across Federal, Tribal, State, local, and private lands. Partnerships, including those beyond existing contracts and agreements, will help identify barriers to success and ways to overcome them.

Hazardous Fuels Reduction

The Forest Service has worked closely with the regions to identify projects within high risk firehatched landscapes designed to reduce wildfire risk to communities and watersheds. The funding of these projects, using the over \$1.6 billion in the BIL, will allow us to begin implementing the 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Forest Service is also leveraging this moment to increase funding opportunities to work with Tribal partners, young adult, Native youth, and veteran crews to treat hazardous fuels in firehatched on federal lands.

The Forest Service is prioritizing investments of the \$400 million authorized under Section 40804 of the BIL to provide financial assistance to facilities that purchase and process byproducts from ecosystem restoration projects and the \$12 million from Division J of the BIL that support wood innovations and community wood proposals in priority firehatched landscapes. The Forest Service will also explore options to establish innovative new approaches for delivering financial assistance to forest products facilities via existing authorities.

Section 40804 of the BIL provides \$160 million to provide funds to States and Tribes for implementing restoration projects on federal lands through the Good Neighbor Authority.

Section 40808 of the BIL codifies the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership Program, including criteria for evaluation of proposals, and authorizes the appropriation of \$90 million for each of fiscal years 2022 and 2023, with not less than 40 percent allocated to carry out eligible activities through the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and not less than 40 percent allocated to carry out eligible activities through the Forest Service. The Joint Chiefs program reduces wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protects water quality and supply, and improves wildlife habitat for at-risk species. The Joint Chiefs program also leverages technical and financial assistance to increase the pace and scale of restoration efforts across all lands. This multi-year partnership between the Forest Service and the NRCS has been in place since fiscal year 2014 and has provided \$335 million in funding for 110 projects.

Section 40806 of the BIL provides the Forest Service with new National Environmental Policy Act authorities, including a new Categorical Exclusion for linear fuel breaks. The Forest Service has prepared guidance to assist Forests and Regions in applying the new Categorical Exclusion and it is available for use currently. We will update Forest Service NEPA directives to include the categorical exclusion in the future.

Cooperative Fire Risk Mitigation

The Forest Service is working with the National Association of State Foresters, Intertribal Timber Council, and other partners to implement the Community Wild-fire Defense Grant (CWDG) Program authorized in Section 40803(f) of the BIL and funded with \$1 billion to be spent over a five-year period. The CWDG program will provide financial assistance to “at-risk” communities to develop CWPPs and to implement prevention and mitigation activities described within CWPPs which will reduce wildfire risk. Communities that have a high or very high risk of wildfire, are considered low-income, or have been impacted by a severe disaster will all be given priority in the consideration process for grants.

Division J of the BIL appropriates not less than \$88 million additional funds for State Fire Assistance (SFA) and \$20 million for Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) to be spent over a five-year period. The additional SFA grant funding will assist State forestry agencies to improve the capacity State forestry agencies to assist communities with wildfire mitigation efforts and to increase local capacity to respond to and suppress wildfires. The additional VFA funding will assist rural volunteer fire departments to make initial attack response on wildfires while they are small and easier to suppress.

BIL and Post Fire Recovery

Sections 70301–70303 of the BIL, the REPLANT Act, gives us a historic opportunity to address the reforestation backlog needs from wildfires and other disturbances. This provision removes the \$30 million annual cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund, giving the Forest Service more resources for post-fire reforestation. With the REPLANT Act, we anticipate spending between \$140 to \$260 million per year for reforestation and related work. This will enable us to ramp up reforestation treatments to almost 500,000 acres/year, including 200,000 acres of planting—a more than 300% increase. The Forest Service is developing policy to implement this program using existing programmatic structures. Reforestation provides one of the main tools for national forests to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change. By reforesting in the right place, at the right time, with the right trees, we foster development of future resilient forests, and the ecosystem benefits they provide for us and future generations.

Section 40803 of the BIL provides \$100 million to the Forest Service for burned area rehabilitation activities that must be implemented within 3 years of containment of a wildland fire. Division J includes \$45 million each of fiscal years 2022–2026 for post-fire recovery as well. These funds are being focused on the repair or improvement of lands unlikely to recover naturally to a management-approved condition and to repair and replace minor infrastructure and facilities damaged by the fire.

Section 40804 of the BIL also provides funding for revegetation activities which will involve interagency collaboration and coordination in support of the National Seed Strategy.

Section 40807 of the BIL authorizes emergency determinations that allow for proactive or post-event emergency actions to address underlying emergency conditions. The authority can be used for single event responses or be applied to larger landscapes as conditions warrant. Procedures and guidance for applying the emergency determination authority are being developed.

Division J of the BIL appropriates \$300 million in additional funding for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program to repair damages to the waterways and watersheds resulting from natural disasters. The Forest Service is currently working with NRCS to develop an MOU to guide the process of using these funds to implement projects on NFS lands.

BIL and Wildland Firefighter Compensation

Hiring and retaining firefighters in increasingly long and complex fire years is a challenge that we take seriously. The BIL provides targeted funds that enable the Forest Service to make significant investments in a stable, professional, permanent wildland firefighting workforce, and in programs that focus on mental health, resilience, and well-being. Section 40803(d) of the BIL calls for the classification of a wildland firefighter series, provides for possible pay increases for wildland firefighters, and for the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to convert 1,000 seasonal firefighters into permanent fire managers. USDA, in collaboration with its partners at DOI and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), is working to implement the BIL classification, pay, and staffing conversion provisions.

To implement Section 40803(d)(4)(B), we are coordinating with DOI and OPM to provide the Secretaries with analyses of “specified geographic areas in which it is difficult to recruit or retain a Federal wildland firefighter” as outlined in the BIL.

The funds allocated in the BIL are a first step in appropriately compensating our federal wildland firefighters. We are looking beyond the BIL to develop longer-term proposals to permanently revise wildland firefighter pay.

BIL and Technology Investments in Wildland Fire

Section 40803 of the BIL establishes \$10 million for the Forest Service and DOI to spend on the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) Program to rapidly detect and report wildfire starts; \$30 million for USDA grants to States and local governments to establish and operate Reverse-911 telecommunication systems; and \$10 million shared between Forest Service and DOI for the procurement and placement of wildfire detection and real-time monitoring equipment, such as sensors, cameras, and other relevant equipment, in areas at risk of wildfire or post-burned areas.

On March 9, 2022, the initial kickoff for the ground-based cameras and sensors project was conducted and we are working with Alert Wildfire regarding architectures and agreement structures. We have also met with NASA and Delphire Technologies regarding sensors and integrating sensor data. We are working with the Colorado Center of Excellence to secure agreements and kick off pilot testing.

We have been meeting weekly with NOAA and Interagency Council for Advancing Meteorological Services (ICAMS) to coordinate work plans and spend plans through active public-private partnerships. We are also working with the Thermal Working Group to build an evaluation plan of GOES, Fire Autonomous Detection & Dissemination System (FADDS), and other sources of data.

Wildfire Commission in BIL

In December 2021, USDA, DOI, and the Department of Homeland Security through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced the establishment of a Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission. This Commission fulfills Sections 70201–70207 of the BIL and represents a critical step in combating the wildfire crisis and improving resilience on the nation's landscapes. The Wildfire Mitigation and Management Commission is tasked to study and make recommendations to improve Federal policies relating to—(1) the prevention, mitigation, suppression, and management of wildland fires in the United States; and (2) the rehabilitation of land in the United States devastated by wildland fires. An announcement calling for applications to the commission, with a focus on non-federal members, representing State, local, Tribal, and private stakeholders, was announced on March 10, 2022, and closed on March 25, 2022. Applications are currently under review, with the first Commission meeting targeted for late spring.

Conclusion

We greatly appreciate the significant resources Congress has provided through the BIL that will allow the Forest Service, with our many partners, to take the initial steps to address the wildfire crisis. This work will result in resilient landscapes that have ecologic integrity, provide essential ecosystem services including carbon storage and habitat for wildlife, and boundless opportunities for American citizens to recreate.

The Forest Service looks forward to working with this Subcommittee to reduce the severity of wildfires in our country. This concludes our testimony. We welcome any questions the Subcommittee may have.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO JAEITH HALL-RIVERA, DEPUTY CHIEF,
STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY, U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Questions Submitted by Representative Porter

Question 1. The Subcommittee is aware that the U.S. Forest Service recently completed a Recruitment and Retention Survey in Region 5. Please provide the Subcommittee with the results of this survey and any additional views USFS wishes to share with the Subcommittee.

Answer. The Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) is in the process of soliciting information from firefighters on what they perceive to be the challenges for recruiting and retaining firefighters in California. Initial data has been summarized into eight issues. While these issues were previously identified, extensive analytical and empirical breakdown of the barriers impacting recruitment and retention has been lacking. The Pacific Southwest Regions' efforts to gather data will help support agency-wide efforts to address these issues. The Region 5 Fire and Aviation

Management Recruitment and Retention Survey is included as Appendix A. [The Appendix can be viewed on the Committee Repository at: <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II10/20220405/114579/HHRG-117-II10-20220405-SD32425667.pdf>]

Hiring and retaining wildland firefighters in increasingly long and complex fire years is a challenge that we take seriously. The BIL and the FY 2023 President's Budget provide a significant down payment toward Forest Service investments in a stable, professional, permanent wildland firefighting workforce, as well as for workforce programs that focus on mental health, resilience, and wellbeing. The BIL remedies many issues that have been front and center for the wildland firefighting community. We continue to hear substantial concerns from the field, and we acknowledge that there is more work to do on issues such as housing and work/life balance during the very stressful fire years, as well as the need to increase firefighter capacity. We will continue to work on these issues so that jobs with the Forest Service remain a desirable and sought-after opportunity.

The BIL provides a \$600 million investment in firefighter pay increases to the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior, as well as conversions of temporary employees to permanent full-time employees. These permanent firefighters will be able to respond to wildfires as well as increase hazardous fuel treatments across landscapes before wildfires happen. We are working diligently with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to identify which positions are eligible for BIL pay increases.

The BIL also directed the development of a new Wildland Firefighter occupational series. The Forest Service is collaborating with the Department of the Interior and the OPM to create a wildland firefighter occupational series that better reflects the unique responsibilities and skillsets of our firefighters. To ensure this process is evidence-based and objective, we are assembling and analyzing extensive workforce data and collecting input from a diverse group of firefighters across a range of positions, particularly from field-level personnel.

The FY 2023 Budget requests an increase of more than \$330 million from the FY 2022 Enacted level in Wildland Fire Management Salaries and Expenses to ensure ongoing support of these priorities, implement the \$15 per hour minimum wage for firefighters, and gradually raise base capacity levels to enhance response to year-round fire activity. Additionally, a \$20 million increase in the FY 2023 Budget from FY2022 Enacted levels in Wildland Fire Management Preparedness will be leveraged to supply fleet, equipment, and supplies for increased base capacity staffing levels.

Under President Biden's initiatives to recognize and support federal wildland firefighters, more than 11,300 firefighters received an additional \$24.3 million in pay in 2021. In January 2022, a permanent federal minimum wage of \$15/hour was implemented via Executive Order. Creating greater pay parity commensurate with non-federal firefighters will likely help resolve recruitment and challenges, and result in significant cost savings in training firefighters due to attrition.

The Forest Service continues to work through the staffing process of our largest onboarding period for firefighters for both temporary and permanent employees. Interviews and selections are ongoing.

Question 2. How much money did USFS spend on reimbursement to state and local authorities for firefighting resources through intergovernmental agreements or other mechanisms during FY22? What does USFS project to spend in FY23? Please provide information disaggregated by state, region, and National Forest.

Answer. Through March FY 2022, the Forest Service spent the following on reimbursements to states and local authorities for firefighting resources through cooperative agreements. The data is provided by state only. Reimbursements are managed at the national level for state payments, and we do not reconcile them at different levels of the agency (region and national forest).

Table 1: Forest Service Fire Suppression Cooperative Agreements

State	FY 2022 through March (\$)	Percent of Total
Alabama	0	0%
Alaska	185,885	0%
Arizona	8,918,758	3%
California	219,899,743	71%
Colorado	7,685,346	2%
District of Columbia	0	0%
Florida	39,834	0%
Georgia	0	0%
Idaho	7,146,690	2%
Kentucky	8,907	0%
Louisiana	0	0%
Maryland	78,897	0%

State	FY 2022 through March (\$)	Percent of Total
Michigan	305,962	0%
Minnesota	3,391,396	1%
Mississippi	97,209	0%
Missouri	1,570	0%
Montana	11,743,143	4%
Nebraska	176,616	0%
Nevada	6,783,979	2%
New Hampshire	7,361	0%
New Mexico	3,303,822	1%
New York	378,505	0%
North Carolina	47,113	0%
North Dakota	155,997	0%
Ohio	93,174	0%
Oregon	13,002,185	4%
South Dakota	635,217	0%
Tennessee	26,100	0%
Texas	932,445	0%
Utah	1,501,198	0%
Virginia	95,665	0%
Washington	5,674,549	2%
West Virginia	42,945	0%
Wyoming	7,873,535	3%
National Support*	10,833,335	3%
Total	311,067,079	100%

*National Support includes costs for fire suppression activities occurring on multiple wildfires which cannot be attributed to a specific wildfire, such as dispatch work or local cache activity. It also includes Severity costs, which are used to adjust planning to improve initial attack response as well as wildfire prevention activities when extraordinary weather and/or fire conditions have the potential to result in wildfires. Lastly, it includes costs to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

The agency does not project suppression costs by individual cost categories but instead focuses on the estimated overall need for the upcoming year's fire activity. For FY2023, the agency requested \$1.011 billion in Suppression and \$2.21 billion in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund (fire fix) in the President's Budget Request. Each fire year's suppression costs are unique and driven by the complexities of fire activity, and most significantly by locations of fire starts, which are unpredictable.

Note that fires not only span fiscal years, but also costs associated with a wildfire incident may take multiple fiscal years to resolve as items like cost-share agreements, cost-recovery efforts, and invoice submissions are reconciled. Consequently, the figures displayed in this table reflect significant costs from fire suppression activity from the fourth quarter of FY21 and prior.

Question 3. How much money did USFS spend contracting for firefighting resources during FY22? How much does USFS project to spend in FY23? Please provide information disaggregated by state, region, National Forest.

Answer. Through March of FY 2022 the Forest Service has spent the following on contracts for firefighting resources.

Table 2: Forest Service Fire Suppression Contracts by National Forest

Region	Region Name	Forest	FY 2022 through March (\$)	Percent of Total
R01	Northern Region	Beaverhead-Deerlodge	26,297,532	
		Bitterroot	43,350	
		Dakota Prairie Grasslands	318,659	
		Flathead	1,130,246	
		Custer-Gallatin	1,098,059	
		Idaho Panhandle	14,272,198	
		Kootenai	7,206,183	
		Helena-Lewis and Clark	13,893,963	
		Lolo	4,483,397	
		Nez Perce-Clearwater	4,801,519	
		***Regional Services	859,843	
		R01 Total	74,404,949	8%
R02	Rocky Mountain Region	Arapaho-Roosevelt	438,334	
		Bighorn	535,602	
		Black Hills	96,022	
		Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison	0	
		Medicine Bow-Routt	1,754,762	
		Nebraska	0	
		Pike-San Isabel	154,959	
		Rio Grande	0	
		San Juan	128,032	
		Shoshone	1,492,363	
		White River	787,217	
		***Regional Services	73,191	
		R02 Total	5,460,482	1%
R03	Southwestern Region	Apache-Sitgreaves	1,800,052	
		Carson	112,275	
		Cibola	220,933	
		Coconino	995,159	
		Coronado	3,372,627	
		Gila	199,325	
		Kaibab	0	

Region	Region Name	Forest	FY 2022 through March (\$)	Percent of Total
		Lincoln	17,859	
		Prescott	2,215,403	
		Santa Fe	981,578	
		Tonto	6,314,303	
		***Regional Services	111,213	
		R03 Total	16,340,728	2%
R04	Intermountain Region	Ashley	13,360	
		Boise	792,953	
		Bridger-Teton/Caribou- Targhee/Salmon-Challis	309,305	
		Caribou-Targhee	2,177	
		Dixie	312,221	
		Fishlake/Humboldt-Toiyabe	22,753	
		Humboldt-Toiyabe	2,318,939	
		Manti-La Sal	583,346	
		Payette	618,441	
		Salmon-Challis	3,457,505	
		Sawtooth	2,000,583	
		Uinta-Wasatch-Cache	62,049	
		***Regional Services	696,915	
		R04 Total	11,190,549	1%
R05	Pacific Southwest Region	Angeles	1,795,898	
		Cleveland	697,049	
		Eldorado	67,125,064	
		Inyo	1,005,425	
		Klamath	82,357,792	
		Lake Tahoe Basin	428,026	
		Lassen	1,399,975	
		Los Padres	8,880,986	
		Mendocino	1,490,547	
		Modoc	1,382,224	
		Plumas	2,931,490	
		San Bernardino	541,101	
		Sequoia	758,793	
		Shasta Trinity	63,224,242	
		Sierra	360,268	
		Six Rivers	30,672,437	
		Stanislaus	645,428	
		Tahoe	81,743	
		***Regional Services	734,938	

Region	Region Name	Forest	FY 2022 through March (\$)	Percent of Total
		R05 Total	266,513,428	27%
R06	Pacific Northwest Region	Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area	0	
		Colville	7,554,677	
		Deschutes	957,983	
		Fremont-Winema	23,676,961	
		Gifford Pinchot	0	
		Malheur	1,459,382	
		Mt Baker-Snoqualmie	5,397	
		Mt Hood	14,796,794	
		Ochoco	95,038	
		Okanogan-Wenatchee	42,096,087	
		Olympic	0	
		Rogue River-Siskiyou	1,668,272	
		Siuslaw	0	
		Umatilla	11,405,720	
		Umpqua	65,114,982	
		Wallowa-Whitman	434,800	
		Willamette	25,597,112	
		***Regional Services	403,133	
		R06 Total	195,266,339	20%
R08	Southern Region	Chattahoochee-Oconee	117,085	
		Cherokee	74,877	
		Daniel Boone	96,564	
		Francis Marion-Sumter	323,537	
		George Washington-Jefferson	38,550	
		Kisatchie	46,163	
		NF In Alabama	276,181	
		NF in Florida	302,814	
		NF in Mississippi	371,660	
		NF in North Carolina	191,099	
		NFS In Texas	27,063	
		Ouachita	92,714	
		***Regional Services	381,022	
		R08 Total	2,339,328	0%
R09	Eastern Region	Chequamegon-Nicolet	0	
		Chippewa	0	
		Green Mountain & Finger Lakes	0	
		Hiawatha	0	
		Huron-Manistee	0	

Region	Region Name	Forest	FY 2022 through March (\$)	Percent of Total
		Mark Twain	77,930	
		Monongahela	0	
		Ottawa	0	
		Shawnee	0	
		Superior	4,548,710	
		Wayne	0	
		White Mountain	0	
		***Regional Services	282,551	
		R09 Total	4,909,272	0%
R10	Alaska Region	Chugach	0	
		Tongass	0	
		***Regional Services	21,682	
		R10 Total	21,682	0%
	National Support	*National Operations	216,631,351	22%
	Non-Forest Service Jurisdiction	**Non FS Jurisdiction	190,356,081	19%
		Grand Total	983,434,189	100%

*National Support includes costs for fire suppression activities occurring on multiple wildfires which cannot be attributed to a specific wildfire, such as dispatch work or local cache activity. It also includes Severity costs, which are used to adjust planning to improve the initial attack response as well as wildfire prevention activities when extraordinary weather and/or fire conditions have the potential to result in wildfires. Lastly, it includes costs to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

**Non Forest Service Jurisdiction are Wildfires managed by other agencies in which the Forest Service contributed to the efforts.

***Regional Services includes costs for suppression activities that occur across forest boundaries within the region.

The agency does not project suppression costs by individual cost categories but instead focuses on the estimated overall need for the upcoming year's fire activity. For FY2023, the agency has requested \$1.011 billion in Suppression and \$2.21 billion in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund (fire fix) in the President's Budget Request. Each fire year's suppression costs are unique and driven by the complexities of fire activity, and most significantly by locations of fire starts, which are unpredictable.

Note that fires not only span fiscal years, but also costs associated with a wildfire incident may take multiple fiscal years to resolve as items like cost-share agreements, cost-recovery efforts, and invoice submissions are reconciled. Consequently, the figures displayed in this table reflect significant costs from fire suppression activity from the fourth quarter of FY21 and prior.

Question 4. The Subcommittee understands that Region 6 Type 1 Interagency Hotshot Crews (IHC) receive an average of \$38,000 per year to procure equipment such as PPE, chainsaws, and communications equipment. The Subcommittee understands that most Region 5 IHCs receive a budget of roughly \$8,000–\$10,000 for the same requirements.

(4a). Please explain this discrepancy.

(4b). Does the USFS believe that out-of-pocket expenses associated with equipment may be contributing to the financial strain on wildland firefighters in Region 5? If so, what steps is USFS taking to address these add financial burdens?

Answer. The disparity between operating budgets of Hot Shot crews is happening, and we are taking steps to address the issue. This disparity occurs for several reasons but can be attributed primarily to the way we allocate funds within the agency. All funds are initially allocated from the national office to Regions who then distribute these funds amongst national forest units based on national and regional priorities. Given the range of priorities across Regions, the amount allocated to one national forest and subsequent crews within that unit does vary across the agency.

Given the importance of all firefighting assets, the Forest Service recognizes the need to standardize the process for acquiring equipment to ensure crews can operate safely and effectively. In FY 2022 the agency established a new process that supplements the initial allocation crews and other firefighters receive for equipment, so they can replace, purchase and maintain existing essential equipment. This enables all firefighting assets to maintain equipment standards throughout the year. The

agency is assessing a more robust change in our allocation strategy that will move toward a more standardized system for allocation of funds to Regions for IHCs and other national fire response resources for firefighting equipment needs.

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you, Ms. Hall-Rivera.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Brian Ferebee, Chief Executive of Intergovernmental Relations at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Mr. Ferebee, you have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF BRIAN FEREBEE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you, Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Herrell, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, or BIL, is a critical first step in helping the Forest Service to confront the wildfire crisis. As outlined by Deputy Chief Hall-Rivera, the benefits that American forests and grasslands provide are at risk from wildfire. Unless we do something about the wildfire crisis, it would only get worse.

To protect communities and natural resources, we need to restore healthy, resilient, fire-adapted forests. It would take a paradigm shift to confront the wildfire crisis facing the nation. The old paradigm is to use our limited funds and capacity to scatter treatments randomly across the landscape to the best of our limited ability.

The new paradigm is to step up the pace and scale of our treatments to match the actual scale of the wildfire crisis across the landscape while using science as an underpinning to assist in determining where we treat. We worked with scientists, tribes, state governments, and partner organizations to prepare the 10-year strategy and draft implementation plan for confronting the wildfire crisis while also working with DOI on their 5-year strategic plan. While we sustain current treatment levels in the South, Midwest, and Northeast, we plan to dramatically increase fuels and forest health treatments by up to four times the current treatment levels in the West where the wildfire risk to homes and communities are the highest.

Less than 10 percent of our fire-prone forests in the West account for roughly 80 percent of the fire risk to communities. While we will focus on high-risk firesheds where the risk to lives, homes, communities, and natural resources are the greatest, we will work with partners to treat an additional 20 million acres on National Forest System lands and 30 million acres on other Federal, state, and tribal private lands.

In order to implement this nation-wide strategy, we are building a workforce capacity in the Forest Service to match the scale of the work. To achieve the collective impact that our forests and communities need, we must build a coalition to work across land management jurisdictions, leverage diverse capacity, and build broad public and community support to work at the scale necessary to make a difference. This includes work across Federal, state, local, and private lands and with nongovernmental organizations. The BIL supports the Forest Service's efforts to confront this crisis by

investing in hazardous fuel reduction, bio-risk mitigation across boundaries, and post-fire restoration.

The Agency is working closely with the regions to identify projects within high-risk fire-shed landscapes, designed to reduce wildfire risks to communities and watersheds. The funding of these projects using the over \$1 billion authorized under the Section 40803 in the BIL will allow us to begin implementing the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

The REPLANT Act under Section 70301–70303 of the BIL gives us an historic opportunity to address reforestation backlog needs with wildfires and other disturbances. This provision removes the cap from reforestation trust funds, giving us more resources for post-fire restoration. This will enable us to ramp up the reforestation treatments to almost a half a million acres a year, including 200,000 acres of planting, a more than 300 percent increase.

The BIL provides \$100 million under Section 40803 and \$45 million under Division J for restoration activities that are implemented no later than 3 years after the date of wildfires is contained. These funds are being focused to repair and replace minor infrastructure and facility damaged by fires and on the repair or improvement of lands that are unlikely to recover naturally to the management-approved conditions. The BIL makes important investments in cross-boundary tools such as Good Neighbor Authority by providing \$160 million in Section 40804 to provide funds to states and tribes for implementing restoration projects on Federal lands and by codifying the Joint Chief Landscape Restoration Partnership Program in Section 40808.

In closing, we greatly appreciate the significant down payment Congress has provided through the BIL that will allow us, the Forest Service, with many of our partners, to take the initial steps to address the wildfire crisis. This work will result in resilient landscapes that have ecologic integrity, provide essential ecosystem services, including carbon storage and habitat for wildlife, and boundless opportunities for American citizens to recreate.

The Forest Service looks forward to working with you in the Subcommittee to reduce the severity of wildfires in our country. Thank you for this opportunity. Happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ferebee follows:]

Mr. Ferebee's prepared statement is combined with Ms. Jaelith Hall-Rivera (see page 21).

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO MR. BRIAN FEREBEE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE

Questions Submitted by Representative Grijalva

Question 1. How much (or what percentage) of USFS BIL funding is expected to support salaries and related expenses? Please provide as much detail as possible about which positions within the agency will be funded, including which BIL programs and appropriations accounts will support which positions.

Answer. Implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) will take significant staff support, both federal employees and contract staff. However, funds were not provided specifically for salaries and expenses (S&E). With the new Forest Service budget structure, S&E funds needed to be transferred from the program

funds into the specific S&E accounts. The Forest Service continues to refine these estimates as implementation continues. Below is more detail on funding and positions:

- Research and Development (R&D) account
 - Research and Development is funded at \$68M, including transfers. \$26.4M or 39% of the funds will be used to support S&E.
 - In FY 2022, the agency's investment in R&D salaries will focus on staffing to provide science, science delivery, and decision support to enhance the rigor and impact of the implementation of BIL provisions.
 - Positions for science support of implementation include field technicians, postdoctoral scientists (terms and NTEs), technology transfer specialists, science communication specialists, and project coordinators to leverage partnerships with universities and to assist with delivering value to the deputy areas implementing provisions.
- Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CIM) account—The National Forest System is analyzing the appropriate mix of federal and contract staff prior to transferring any CIM funds for S&E.
- National Forest System (NFS) account
 - National Forest System is funded at \$499M, including transfers. \$146.8M or 29% of the funds will be used to support S&E. This may be impacted by the mix of federal and contract staff determined for CIM.
 - For FY 2022, the agency's support to NFS salaries will be focused on providing funds for on-the-ground staffing and support staff needed to facilitate funding to partners for critical project work.
 - Positions to support implementation include contracting specialists, grants and agreement specialists, engineers, as well as natural resource specialists providing technical assistance, oversight, and monitoring.
- State and Private Forestry (SPF) account
 - State and Private Forestry is funded at \$260M, including transfers. \$9.1M or 3% of the funds will be used to support S&E.
 - For FY 2022, the agency's support to SPF salaries will be focused on providing funds for on-the-ground staffing and support staff needed to facilitate funding to partners for critical project work.
 - Positions to support implementation include grants and agreement specialists and natural resource specialists to provide technical assistance, oversight and monitoring.
- Wildland Fire Management (WFM) account
 - Wildland Fire Management is funded at \$552M, including transfers. \$499M or 91% of the funds will be used to support S&E. Of this, \$480 million, or 87% is for the wildland firefighter pay supplement provision.
 - For FY22, the agency's support to WFM salaries will be focused on addressing the wildfire crisis with a primary focus on the recently announced initial landscapes at high risk of wildfire and ongoing fire suppression needs.
 - Positions to support implementation include firefighters for on the ground implementation and resource specialists to provide technical assistance, oversight, and monitoring.
- Forest Service Operations (FSO) account
 - Of the funds transferred to FSO, \$69M or 33% of the funds will be used to support S&E.
 - Positions to support implementation include human resources specialists, information technology specialists, grants and agreements specialists, contracting specialists, budget and management analysts, accountants and financial analysts, work environment specialists, and communications coordinators.

Question 2. BLM recently announced an initiative focused on hiring hundreds of additional staff to make up for a long-standing shortfall in workforce capacity. The Forest Service has similarly testified about the challenges associated with addressing non-fire staffing capacity which has significantly declined over time. Is USFS

planning a similar staffing effort focused on non-fire workforce? If so, for what positions and where within the agency will these new hires be located?

Answer. The Forest Service is preparing a strategic staffing plan to meet the expectations of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). With major investments in ecosystem restoration, now is the time to add both short and long-term capacity for delivering outcomes associated with these efforts, which requires staffing support from a variety of occupations. With the amount of attrition estimated to exceed 20 percent over the next 5 years, coupled with historically low staffing levels and limited Human Resource Management capacity needed to enable the hiring and onboarding of additional Forest Service positions we will use a collective hiring model to build capacity in priority programs and locations.

To facilitate short-term, large-scale hiring, we are implementing a national hiring strategy designed to target our most critical capacity needs using expedited processes. In the first wave, we hired:

- 91 Grants and Agreements Specialists
- 149 Contract Specialists
- Over 100 Human Resources Specialists and Assistants

The second, and future waves, are focused on occupations that increase capacity to conduct critical program-level projects, including Civil Engineers, Foresters and natural resource professionals to design, create, and ensure agency work meets the highest standards of natural resource management. These positions are targeted toward locations across the spectrum of National Forest System lands, primarily at the National Forest and Ranger District levels, for the purpose of planning, and implementing vital ecosystem restoration and wildfire mitigation work. Currently, we are employing traditional advertisements and using special hiring authorities to add critical engineering and natural resources (STEM) positions. Hiring for the following vacant positions is well underway and we anticipate many of the selected candidates will be onboard by the end of September, with a handful onboarding in early FY 2023.

- Approximately 150 Civil Engineers
- 250 Foresters, and more than 500 Forestry Technicians
- 1,000 Recreation Management Specialists, Recreation Technicians, and Archaeologists (total for all three professions)

In late July, we anticipate starting the process to hire for the following occupations, starting with the Partnership and Community Engagement Coordinators. Onboarding is anticipated to occur through the first quarter of FY 2023:

- Approximately 50 Partnerships and Community Engagement Coordinators
- Over 100 Lands and Special Uses Specialists
- Natural Resources Specialists and Biological Scientists (number to be determined)

This critical hiring effort includes positions at all levels of the agency and in locations across the nation.

Additionally, State and Private Forestry programs have evolved, and we are developing our workforce to meet these trends and future demand. Non-fire positions are being added to assist States, Tribes, localities, and underserved communities. The BIL limited spending for salary and related expenses to 3% of funds within Division J. With available funds from BIL and regular appropriations, State and Private Forestry will focus staffing to contribute to agency goals. Our cooperative programs protect communities from wildfire, restore and increase resilience of non-federal forests, help create markets for wood products, enhance urban forests, especially to advance racial equity, and address threats to Federal and non-federal forests from insects and disease. Positions in State and Private Forestry are being added principally in regional and field offices to revitalize and expand technical customer service delivery for all our programs. Demand for technical assistance has increased due to trends in climate change and increased invasive species introductions. Forest health technical assistance provides support for prevention and suppression management activities to address these issues. Positions in Cooperative Forestry are being added to support enhanced forest conservation and retention, urban and community forestry and wood innovations like mass timber market development and biomass-based renewable fuels.

Question 3. The BIL requires USFS to issue a Five-Year Monitoring, Maintenance, and Treatment Plan. This type of information is also typically provided in annual budget submissions. Please outline how USFS will be reporting annual accomplishments to Congress, specifically how the agency plans to communicate metrics and programmatic accomplishments beyond simply “acres treated” and board feet cleared. For example, is there a plan to monitor metrics such as improved Fire Regime Condition Class and expected maintenance intervals, acres treated with prescribed fire or restored by managed fire, miles of unneeded road removed, road to trail conversions, watersheds moved to an improved condition class, miles of fish habitat reconnected, the number of culverts storm-proofed, acres of critical habitat and wildlife corridors restored? Are there other metrics USFS is tracking or considering?

Answer. Congress passing the BIL provided the Forest Service a unique opportunity to be more strategic in the way we approach planning and implementation of our work. In addition, we are leveraging this opportunity to evaluate how we define and measure success related to reducing risk to our communities, community infrastructure and associated economies. In short, we are developing new outcome performance measures that better describe success while building upon our current output measures.

The complexity of BIL funding allocation poses several unique reporting challenges that merit special action to ensure that the Forest Service can provide full accountability for funding use and provide the highest possible service to the public. The agency is establishing a centralized and comprehensive data governance model to assist land managers in making funding decisions over the life of BIL implementation. Accurate and precise planning and frequent reporting in our authoritative data systems are critical foundational steps to creating transparency, accessibility and engagement in BIL implementation.

We are focused on outcome-based work to achieve mutually desired priorities, including reducing risk to people, communities, natural resources, and other values at the scale of wildfire risk. While accomplishing this work with and through partners, we will use prioritization tools including Potential Operational Delineations when looking at project layout and design. The Forest Service currently uses the Terrestrial Condition Assessment to analyze and report on ecological outcomes in an annual key performance indicator (percent of National Forests System landscape ecosystems improved, maintained, or recovering due to management actions). We are also developing outcome-based performance measures to track accomplishments and effectiveness and inform continued work, including refreshed key performance indicators.

In addition to reducing wildland fire risk, successful implementation of the BIL will include a wide range of restoration activities, including restoring fish passages; detecting and eradicating invasive species; mitigating environmental hazards from mined lands; and national reforestation efforts. Measures of success with these activities may include resilience improved in watersheds and landscapes; our ability to tackle climate change; and how we can advance social and racial equity and accessibility during implementation. Ecosystem restoration creates resilient landscapes that can be managed for multiple uses and provide ecosystem services, such as carbon storage and sequestration. Baseline metrics are often our best tangible measure of success in these areas.

For the work under the ecosystem restoration provisions of the BIL, the agency is working to develop guidance in collaboration with our Research and Development Deputy Area for monitoring, reporting, and tracking accomplishments. We are working to develop tracking approaches to work within existing databases and reporting mechanisms (i.e., Biennial Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, Broad Scale Monitoring). National level staff will summarize data for the Regions when it is more efficient to do so. The agency is also exploring options for displaying and communicating these outcomes to the public through our website and other means.

For example, the Forest Service is committed to tracking and reporting on Legacy Roads and Trails projects, requiring several project performance metrics to be reported for all projects receiving BIL funding, including miles of unauthorized and previously closed roads decommissioned, miles of roads converted to trails, miles of upstream aquatic habitat reconnected, number of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species positively impacted, number of culverts replaced, number of road bridges and miles of road improved and others. Reports for all completed projects will be submitted in the fiscal year the project construction is complete.

We recognize the need for monitoring and performance metrics that incorporate old growth conservation or restoration. The agency is in the early stages of working with the science community to develop monitoring protocols for the BIL. We are developing a monitoring system for old growth that uses Forest Inventory and

Analysis data, and may incorporate small area estimation techniques and locally collected information to allow us to track the amount of old growth on National Forest System lands. This method will recognize the ecological variation in regional old growth definitions. We are also evaluating other methods to provide information on the location of old growth forests and track the Forest Service's success conserving, restoring, and adapting these valuable ecosystems. This effort is also consistent with provisions in the recent Executive Order 14072, *Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies*.

Question 4. The BIL contains several grant programs and other mechanism designed to award funds and address cross-boundary projects. These programs and projects are of critical importance to states and local communities. Can USFS commit to notifying Congress and the public as funding opportunities are available, projects are selected, and awards are granted?

Answer. The Forest Service is committed to communicating BIL grant program opportunities on a regular basis to Congress and the public. All competitive grant announcements will be posted to grants.gov to ensure that the public is notified of opportunities to apply. All award information is available to the public via usaspending.gov.

Some BIL provisions have resulted in specific programs that will conduct national and regional competitive grant processes. For the Community Wildfire Defense grant program, the agency is excited about the opportunity to increase community mitigation efforts, working closely with our partners and non-governmental organizations. Another process relates to invasive species funding on non-federal lands. This process will be conducted on a regional basis through State, private, and Forest Service collaboration to determine priority issues, areas and to select projects aimed at those priorities.

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you. The hearing will proceed with Member questions, and we will start with the gentleman from New York, Mr. Tonko. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TONKO. Thank you, Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member Herrell, for holding this hearing and to our witnesses for taking meaningful action to combat wildfires and the climate crisis that fuels them so that communities across our great nation may continue to access clean water, recreation, and certainly wildlife ecosystems for generations.

I am indeed proud to represent the capital region of New York where many in our community care deeply about our nation's public lands and forests, whether they be at home in New York or across the nation. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law focused on the Western forests facing the greatest wildlife risks. But nationally, 20 percent of the nation's freshwater flows from these Forest Service-managed lands.

Mr. Ferebee, as you mentioned in your testimony, more than 60 million people living in 3,400 communities across some 36 states depend on our national forests and grasslands for their drinking water. It is so critical that we implement science-based holistic restoration strategies to combat the wildfire crisis and protect these vital forests for the benefit of communities everywhere. Among the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's investments was a \$100 million annual increase to the Reforestation Trust Fund, wildfire funding included for burned area recovery, restoration programs, and significant funding for DOI and USFS ecosystem restoration and remediation programs. So, Mr. Ferebee, how will the Forest Service leverage these investments to ensure reforestation and restoration are based on science while accounting for climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem services?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. As we move out on this work, it is critically important that we acknowledge all of our work aligned with the provisions, the intent in the provisions of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. And to that point, we are looking at opportunities when we go into project selections to really look at several factors in addition to meeting the intent of the legislation itself.

To your question and point, for instance, around watersheds and watershed health and the critical nature of them, when it comes to, for instance, Legacy Roads and Trails Program, we are looking at criteria such as: Do projects that we receive meet the intent of NEPA? Are they compliant? Are they aligned, and are they in critical watersheds that are important to our nature? Do they help us actually connect upstream habitat for wildlife from a reconnection perspective? Do they address some of the challenges we have when it comes to small culverts in place that have caused us degradation problems?

There will be a number of those kinds of criteria that we will establish to make sure that we are receiving the kind of outcomes that we want to on the landscape as well as outputs. In respect to your question about tracking, we are working closely internally to not only look at how we might allocate these funds in the right place but also having the appropriate mechanisms in place to really track and be transparent around these funds for the American public.

Mr. TONKO. And then how will these investments help build the reforestation pipeline, including efforts to address reforestation needs in Eastern forests and urban areas with poor tree equity?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question again, Congressman. With respect to reforestation, the REPLANT Act provision in legislation really provides us an opportunity from a resource standpoint to do a number of things. One, our agency has developed a strategy to really address the backlog that we are experiencing with reforestation. And in that light, we are looking at being able to treat up to a half a million acres a year with 200,000 of that being reforestation of planting. Alongside of that, as a part of our strategy, we were really looking at how we can grow capacity within our nurseries themselves to have more stock available for reforestation. And lastly, to actually increase our capacity, we are also looking at the opportunity to partner and collaborate more closely with states and tribal governments.

Mr. TONKO. And lastly, Mr. Ferebee, the Forest Service has many existing science-based tools such as the Watershed Condition Framework to help identify restoration needs. Beyond the wildfire funding, how is the Forest Service using these tools and other data to identify priority restoration needs utilizing BIL investments?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for your question, Congressman. To your point, we have a number of tools, such as the Watershed Condition Class Framework. We also have our National Cohesive Strategy. We have shared steward agreements. As I mentioned in my testimony, we also have tools like Good Neighbor Authority. And the Agency is looking at using every tool that we have made available to us by Congress to really show up in this space, to

really change the trajectory of wildfire and at the same time, to make sure that the work that we do is sound, ecologically.

Mr. TONKO. Thank you so much. With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back and thank you for your courtesy.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes Ranking Member Herrell for 5 minutes.

Ms. HERRELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for the testimony. I have a question for Ms. Hall-Rivera. The BIL authorized a new categorical exclusion for fuel breaks and included a new authority for emergency actions, which would allow for fire prevention work to go forward more quickly. So, my question is, why did the 10-year strategy that you published in January include no references to how these authorities will be implemented?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. We deeply appreciate the new tools that are provided to us in the BIL. And I would say, frankly, it was probably just a bit of a timing issue. We were in development with the strategy during the time frame that the Infrastructure Law was being considered because we knew that we needed to be prepared for this crisis either way. We need a plan.

But I will say these tools are important to us, and we are already using them. In fact, I was made aware yesterday there are five projects that are already using this new fuel break CE. So, it's a tool in our toolbox, and we are using it.

Ms. HERRELL. Great. Thank you. And the BIL authorized the establishment of a commission to study and provide recommendations to Congress focused on wildland fire management, including issues related to aerial wildland firefighting equipment. USDA, DOI, and the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency announced that the establishment of the Commission would be December 2021.

But my question to you is—when can we expect the members to be appointed to this Commission, and how will this Commission differ from existing agencies such as the Wildland Fire Leadership Council or the White House Wildland or Wildfire Resilience Inter-agency Working Group? How will it differ?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Sure. I will try to answer that as best I can. The nomination process for the Commission closed last Friday. And I understand we had a very large amount of interest, over 500 applications. So, we, Interior, FEMA, are in the process now of evaluating those. I would expect us to have a list of members—there are a number of categories in the BIL that you are probably aware of that make up the Commission, so I would think maybe in about a month or two that we would be able to name that and then have the Commission get started.

And you rightly point out we have many other inter-agency groups that work in this space. Wildland Fire and Forest Restoration is a complex, inter-jurisdictional, multi-governmental issue. So, at least I think, from our perspective, the more voices that we can get to weigh in on this, the better. And what the Commission does that's a little different than the other ones that you named is that it's really broad, and there are a number of non-Federal entities that will be a part of it that are not present on the

other commissions, even on WFLC, which does have non-Federal membership. So, like I said, more voices—more and more people and more and more citizens are being impacted by this problem. And I think that the nature of the make-up of the Commission recognizes that.

Ms. HERRELL. OK. And last, we have heard that the Forest Service's use of an existing categorical exclusion for removing hazard trees along roads after wildfires has been challenged in court.

So, my question is, are you safely able to re-open roads in places like Oregon or California, or does Congress need to clarify that you have the authority to do so? We just want to make sure that with the tools, you have the authority to do some of these.

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. I know we are implementing numerous hazard tree projects throughout the West, and we are using a fair amount of the funding that came from the disaster supplemental to do that. And we are very appreciative of that. Certainly, we probably do have litigation on some of those projects. I don't have those details in front of me, but I would be happy to get back to you on that and work with you if we are seeing some spaces where we might need a little bit of clarification or assistance. So, thank you for that.

Ms. HERRELL. OK. And just a final question for all three. Have all of you been out and toured our national forests? Have you been to New Mexico, California, Oregon and seen the burn scars or the fire, what our forests look like in terms of the fuel on the ground? I live in the middle of the Lincoln National Forest. Have you been out there, boots on the ground, to see for yourselves what we are dealing with?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes, I certainly have and turn to my colleagues.

Ms. HERRELL. Sir?

Mr. RUPERT. Yes. We were actually out on a trip together just a week ago. I am looking at fuels reduction work and impacts. And I do want to, real briefly, apologize. I misspoke during my opening statement and am guilty of just reading and not thinking.

Ms. HERRELL. No apologies. I heard it, but it's no apologies. I will answer to anything, so you are fine.

Mr. FEREBEE. Yes. As well as my colleagues mentioned, I have had the fortunes or unfortunes to be able to go out and look at some of the great work that's going on but also some of the impacts from areas we have not been able to get to scale at this point to address the issue that we are here to talk about today.

Ms. HERRELL. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentlewoman yields back. I certainly would concur with the Ranking Member and encourage all of you and your staffs within the various departments to come to Colorado and to New Mexico, to the Western states, and see the burn scars for yourself. Clearly you all have but encourage your teams to do so as well. The Chair will now recognize for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from New Mexico, Ms. Leger Fernández.

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you very much, Chair Neguse. And thank you very much for holding this hearing and for having these witnesses testify about the important work that's being done.

Wildfires have been a reality in New Mexico for centuries, for millennia. But we know that climate change and drought are making wildfires worse and we must address that. My brothers, friends, and neighbors are or have been wildland firefighters. Tribes and villages in my district send hotshot crews to battle these life-threatening blazes and have Indigenous ecological knowledge that the Infrastructure Bill is actually going to help fund to utilize that.

And I really appreciate the partnerships that we are doing with the Intertribal Timber Council. Thank you for that. I think we need to remember that our local wildland fighters see their work as not just a job but as a way of protecting the watersheds that our communities depend on for our water, to quench our thirst and grow our crops and as noted, for us to be able to go out and enjoy that nature. So, I think we have to recognize how deep the commitment is that our wildland fighters have, and we must provide them with the support that we can.

My vote in support of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was a recognition of this huge need. It was a recognition that we had to invest in New Mexico and in this region in the reduction of hazardous fuels and community resilience, ecosystem restoration, and more. My community needs these resources, and I am glad that Congress responded.

I also want to give a shout-out. In my district, we have New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute at Highlands University, which is located in Las Vegas, New Mexico. We want to continue to rely on conducting that research and then putting it into the field. I recently visited the Carson National Forest where they are using the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program to work with the Cerro Negro Forestry Council, which hires local *leneros* and woodcutters to help thin certain areas.

It is one of those instances where we are going to have a great symbiotic relationship between community-led forestry. Locals are getting in the business, shall we say, rather than bringing in big, hot crews from elsewhere, right? It is a way of developing local industry as well. Deputy Chief Hall-Rivera, as the Forest Service is rolling out these investments from the Infrastructure Law, how can we make sure we continue to incentivize using local resources and leveraging traditional practices?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Thank you very much for that question, Congresswoman. And I think there are a number of ways that we can look at that with this historic investment that we are going to be doing. And you have named a couple of them. Incorporating traditional ecological knowledge is going to be critical.

And we are improving our acumen in that area. I am not going to say that we have always been perfect at that, but what we need to do is learn together with our tribal sovereign partners on how we can better incorporate their knowledge they have. They have been fire stewards for millennia in this country. So, we are working to be able to incorporate that into our project plans, into our fire plans, to learn from one another as we co-develop these projects. And a great opportunity that BIL gives us is that it names a dollar amount that we can use for the Tribal Forest Protection Act, which is really not something that's happened before. That's a tool that we have had, but having funding associated with it makes it a

higher level of focus for us and ability for us to get those funds and use those projects where we work together with tribes where National Forest System lands and tribal lands are near one another, and we can co-prioritize those projects. So, those are a couple places I would name.

But we are working through roundtables to listen to and work with all kinds of stakeholders at the state and local level in every region of the country, and those are ongoing now.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Thank you very much. And I would also point out that you have that \$200 million that's available to enter into contracts or employ labor crews. I really want to emphasize the importance of trying to do it locally. Mr. Ferebee, we only have a little bit of time left, but do you want to add anything to that?

Mr. RUPERT. I will say I appreciate your emphasis on tribes and tribal contributions. In recent weeks, we have engaged in tribal consultation around infrastructure and received lots of feedback from many tribes identifying the support needs that they have as we move forward with implementing BIL.

Within the Department's existing programs, there are several programs focused on tribal support, Reserved Treaty Land Rights Program. We have a contract support program that we are also focusing on as we implement BIL, looking at really efficiently and effectively moving that support to tribes. And I am very much looking forward—

Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ. My time is up, so thank you very much. And, also, by looking at tribes, I want to also look at local communities like the Lenero Program. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentlewoman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Member for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Herrell, for having this hearing. Thank you to the witnesses. Sometimes it might seem like we are negative about the agencies, but I have traveled across the country and the people that work out in the field that want to do the right thing—it's got to be more frustrating for them than it is to me to see how ineffective we are at managing our Federal lands. At the end of this week, we are having the Western Caucus visit my home of Hot Springs, Arkansas. And I am excited to take them out on the Ouchita National Forest and show them how forest management is actually happening on the national forests and how resilient those forests can be.

Looking at management across the country, the vast amount of the management done and the expenditures happens in the Southeast and the North, definitely east of the hundredth meridian. The wildfires happen mostly west of the hundredth meridian. Can anybody explain to me why the management is vastly happening in the Southeast and North and the fires are mainly happening in the West?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Mr. Westerman, I will take a crack at that and then turn it over to my colleagues as well. I would say part of our aim with the Forest Service's 10-year strategy is to take the model that we have in the Southeast, which is managed forests, that are closer to their natural fire regime because they also have fires. The Southeast is a leader in prescribed fire. And we'd like to

take that model and take it into the West and be able to have our forests——

Mr. WESTERMAN. Do they just burn in the South, or do they do mechanical thinning before they burn?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes, sir. They do both.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Is there a danger of doing prescribed fire without mechanical thinning first?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. I would say in most cases, especially in the West, we need to do mechanical treatment before we introduce fire.

Mr. WESTERMAN. How much mechanical treatment happens in the West?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. In the Forest Service, a little over a million acres a year in the West.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Of mechanical treatment?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Mm-hmm.

Mr. WESTERMAN. How much needs to happen?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, gosh, we think at least 20 million more acres over the next 10 years, and most of that is in the West.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And what's the biggest impediment to that?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, I think there are a lot of challenges. Funding, which the BIL helps us with, capacity, which we are building toward, not only capacity in the Forest Service but, as you know, finding——

Mr. WESTERMAN. What about outside litigants? Does that stop any of it?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. We do have challenges with litigation. Yes, sir.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And you can't fix that. Only Congress can fix that?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. We are always happy to work with you, Congressman, any tools.

Mr. WESTERMAN. We need to fix that, and we haven't. So, I will just go down the panel. The wildfire crisis, is it caused mostly by lack of management or by climate change, Mr. Ferebee?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. I would say that we have acknowledged that there are a number of factors, those two being a part of it.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Which one is the greatest?

Mr. FEREBEE. I am not sure if we as the agency decided which one is the greater. We just acknowledged that there are a number of factors that affect our ability and how we are showing up currently.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Ms. Hall-Rivera?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes. I would concur with that. They are all interwoven. They are not mutually exclusive.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Rupert?

Mr. RUPERT. I agree. Several factors I think as Interior is clearly identifying that climate change is the leading impact with the intensity——

Mr. WESTERMAN. The actions tend to show that we believe it is more climate change. So, doesn't that logically make the reason that instead of spending money on the agencies, we should take all the money we are putting out there to the agencies and invest that in something to mitigate climate change since the management side is not really happening? Aren't you making an argument to

dissolve your very agencies and spend that taxpayer money somewhere else?

Mr. RUPERT. No, I don't think so. In fact, I see our initial work to implement with BIL, it really is that important step. We have been talking about the need to increase support and increase capacity on the ground.

Mr. WESTERMAN. If we come back in a year or 2 years, and there are not any results to show for the money that's being spent, does that not make the argument to the American public that it is an ineffective expenditure of their tax dollars? It is not accomplishing or addressing the real problem?

Mr. RUPERT. I think you will see increased activity on the ground and accomplishments on the ground in Year 1 and Year 2. And I think Year 3 and beyond is where you will start to see the real transformative change.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I know part of the plan that was put out projected Year 6 through 10, but we definitely need to see some progress like last year. We are way behind the eight ball. So, my hope would be that we see dramatic improvements and a dramatic amount of acreage that is being treated and not just all in the Southeast. If you look at the numbers in the West, where most of the fires are happening, it's almost laughable to think that we are claiming a small amount of treatments, and then the treatments aren't really happening where the fires are. I am out of time, and I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the Chair of the Full Committee, Mr. Grijalva, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. Mr. Rupert, just a general question, as you were giving your testimony about how important cross-agency, cross-jurisdictional cooperation and joint planning are going to be in the mission, one of the areas in which I don't think there is a lot of discussion, or needs to be some discussion, has to deal with the jurisdiction prerogatives that exist, cities and towns and counties to basically do their own land use plan. And high-growth regions also happen to be high drought and wildfire impacted regions. I know that's the case made in Arizona and other parts of the country.

So, my question is, how do you see bridging that, beginning with the question about people dealing with the same information because the relationship between the watershed protection, restoration, and the interface, I don't know that that's always a factor. And coming from, as a former county supervisor, it wasn't in the range.

Mr. RUPERT. I will just start with the, as you described, the importance of local community engagement. I think, in even thinking about the Southeast and what is different in the Southeast than perhaps some other parts of the country, that focused work that's going on in the Southeast also includes very active collaborative local level engagement.

That's a fundamentally important part of what happens there to allow everything else. And I think as we talk about tensions and conflicts around land use planning and about risk reduction activities, in my mind, perhaps one of the most important steps we can

take, if not the most important, is to have local community members, local unit managers, Federal, state, tribal, all those other stakeholders in the same room at the same table talking about shared values and coming up with collaborative risk reduction strategies. I think that is the key.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Yes, and I think particularly in the Forest Service that strengthening that role of having the Forest Service play the necessary role of the honest arbitrator in those kind of discussions is critical, and how you build capacity in order to be able to do that as opposed to just getting kind of carried along with the winds because your comment is required in that process. And, at least my experience, sometimes yes, sometimes no, depending. The participation by the Forest Service and by public land agencies was—the consistency wasn't there, on the science and the impact and everything.

So, it's just not even a suggestion—I think it becomes more and more critical for the agency to play that honest arbitrator in those land use kind of discussions that happen at the local level. With that, I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. NEGUSE. The Chairman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Tiffany for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the time. Mr. Rupert, you used the term “collaborative.” Aren't Federal agencies supposed to coordinate with local units of government?

Mr. RUPERT. Yes, absolutely. And I think, from my perspective, that is one of the exciting aspects of infrastructure, is it provides the support for us to have more capacity in that direction and also to develop those relationships to provide the community support for that to happen.

Mr. TIFFANY. Mr. Chairman, I would just say to you that this is a very important distinction in terms of collaborate versus coordinate. They mean two very different things. And I think the agency people know that. “Coordinate” is treating people as equals at the table, local, state officials that they be treated as equals when you are making that decision, rather than where it is the all-knowing people up here in the Federal Government that are dictating to local units of government. That is a great frustration local and state officials have.

Mr. Rupert, you emphasize climate change in your testimony, I believe, and then also in your questioning with Representative Westerman. So, with us being told that it is going to be decades in the future that this is going to continue, why would we spend all kinds of money on this if it is not going to do anything to fix the problem or fix the, quote/unquote, problem?

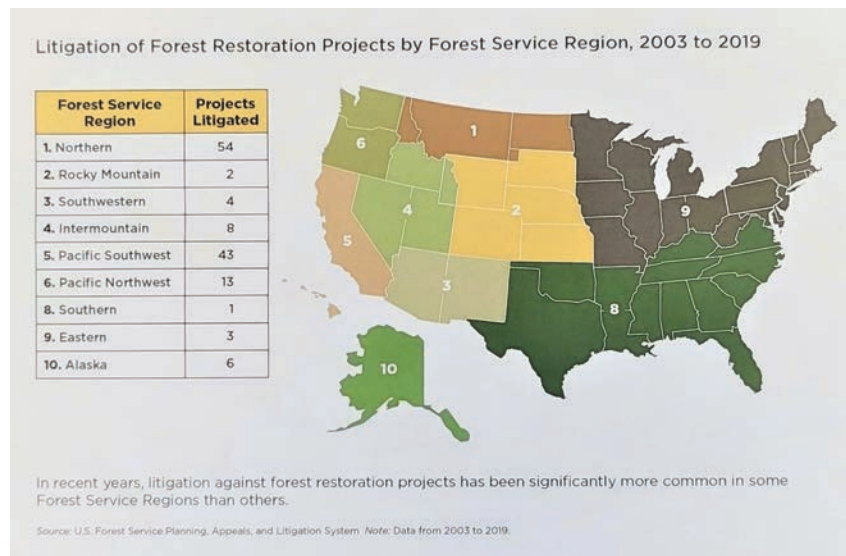
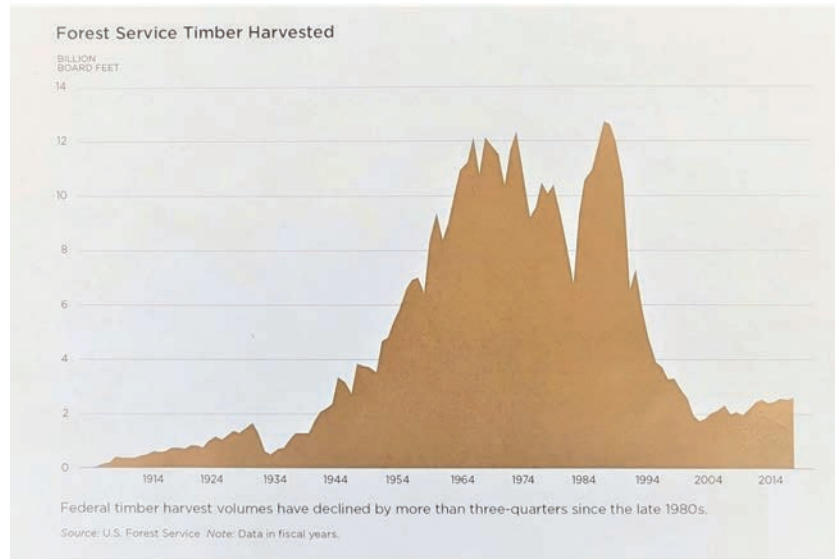
Mr. RUPERT. Well, clearly the vision and the strategy is to make progress and to start on that progress, and the very real experience that we see in Interior wildland fire programs across the land. And, I mean, those effects and that consequence are very real, this trajectory that we are on with impacts, catastrophic intense wild-fire. And we have that—

Mr. TIFFANY. And you know that that's due to climate change?

Mr. RUPERT. I know that the impacts on the ground that we are experiencing are very real.

Mr. TIFFANY. Let me enter into the record here, if I may. Here is the Forest Service timber-harvested data from the early 1900s to 2014, very easy to see the peak that we had back in about 1990. If I may enter that—thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The information follows:]



Mr. TIFFANY. What if it says a result of lack of harvest, the lack of management, the point our Ranking Member has been making consistently that it is a lack of management that is causing this

problem more than anything else. I think this is a terrific document that we should all look at very closely because maybe that is where our problem is. I would just also add living near Lake Superior, we were told—and I see extensive weather data due to a job I had previously coming to here. And from 2004 to 2011, Lake Superior was at a very low level, historic low levels, and we were told it was climate change. Well, Lake Superior now is back at historic high levels as a result of the extreme precipitation or high precipitation we have had in the last 10 years. And we are being told it is climate change that is causing that. And for a lot of people, you just go, “Is there anything that climate change can’t do?”

Ms. Hall-Rivera, I think you used the term “historic investment” in your testimony. I think you said significant down payment. So, you are going to come back looking for more money? Is that right?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Congressman, thank you for that question. I think we have to be realistic about what this problem is costing us as a nation. And you made an important point. We have to do increased management, and we need to use all the tools for doing that, and that includes timber harvest and that includes hazardous fuels treatment. And these are not inexpensive endeavors. It is expensive to treat fuels, it is expensive to do that work.

Mr. TIFFANY. How many jobs have we lost since 1988 as a result of the lack of harvest on the national forests?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, I don’t have that figure in front of me, Congressman, but I can tell you that we have shifted probably—we lost 40 percent of our non-fire workforce in the Forest Service. So, we are having that challenge just within the Forest Service. We have lost a lot of our capacity and our expertise in timber harvests.

Mr. TIFFANY. When are we going to reach the ASQ?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, I know we do meet allowable sale quantities on some of our forests, but we don’t meet it on all of them. So, we have more work to do.

Mr. TIFFANY. How are we going to accomplish this without litigation reform?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, we are appreciative of the reforms that we have received, including the fuel break CE that we talked about earlier. And we are open to working with all of you on additional tools that can help us increase our fuels treatment.

Mr. TIFFANY. I appreciate your answers. Mr. Chairman, I just submit to you we have a huge litigation problem here. I understand that there are multi-million-dollar organizations across the country that do nothing but file lawsuits. And they have created a real problem. And a lot of that problem you see right in this chart that we entered into the record. But I think we should also look at the number of jobs that we have lost, the number of businesses that we have lost in America, especially in the West, as a result of shutting down harvests on our national forests.

We will not correct the problem that we have here without having active management and getting litigation reform. If we don’t reform NEPA, it is not going to happen. We will be here 10 years from now talking about the same thing. Thank you so much for attending today, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair will now recognize himself for 5 minutes of questions.

First, let me say to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle that attended today's hearing, I very much appreciate it. Clearly, there is a strong interest from Members regarding these issues to Mr. Tiffany to Ms. Herrell and to Mr. Westerman as well as to my Democratic colleagues. I would say thank you for participating in today's hearing. I would be remiss if I didn't note that for the better part of the last 2 years since I obtained the gavel, chaired this Subcommittee, I have heard quite a few of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle talk about the need for forest management and hearings on forest management.

And lo and behold, we have a hearing on this important topic. Unfortunately, many of them chose not to attend. But I credit those who did participate, and I appreciate their questioning of the witnesses today. I would like to just take a step back and kind of reframe where we are because I think some of this has kind of gotten lost during the course of today's hearing.

My objective is to follow the science. The science tells us that we need to do more when it comes to forest management. That is an argument that colleagues of mine on both sides of the aisle have made. The science also tells us that the root causes in terms of the intensity, the severity, the pervasiveness, the frequency of these natural disasters that have befallen much of our country and, in particular, the Rocky Mountain West with respect to wildfires and floods is caused by climate change.

So, we ought to take steps to do what we can to mitigate and fight against the climate crisis. Those are not mutually exclusive. I am not really—I guess I am unclear as to why they are being framed as some sort of binary choice. We can and we must do both. And that is precisely why we are gathered here today for this important hearing, and in particular today, we are talking about the former because as our witnesses have expounded about in great detail today, because of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we have a unique generational opportunity to invest in forest management in a way that we haven't in some time.

This bill ultimately allocates \$28 billion which the departments have now announced they will utilize by treating upwards of 50 million acres, 20 million acres with respect to, that is within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government and then through a variety of different grant programs enabling the treatment of 30 million acres on private and tribal land in coordination, as Mr. Tiffany noted.

That should be applauded. That is something that is a unique achievement of the Biden administration. And I just, again, have to say that for my friends on the other side of the aisle who continually kind of pound the table about the need to take these steps and then vote against the same measures that propose to take those steps, it can be a bit confusing to me. But, nonetheless, I am grateful that the Department is taking the steps that they have announced in states ranging from Colorado to Idaho to Utah to Nevada to Wyoming to New Mexico, irrespective of how the Members of Congress who represent those states voted on the ultimate law and the funding that you all now will be implementing.

So, I thank you for your service, and I certainly thank your respective teams back at headquarters and in states across our

country who are doing incredibly important work. I have one question. And it relates to the private land and the grant programs that will be set up under this particular piece of legislation. And I'm interested in hearing a bit more about how you anticipate the Community Wildfire Defense Grants being deployed within our communities.

This money has to get to our communities. In my view, it should have gotten to our communities long ago. And as I said, I come from a district and a state that has been besieged by wildfires as of late. And I guess I would like to get some clarity and some representations from you all that you have the resources that you need from a staffing perspective to deploy these dollars as quickly as possible to communities in the Rocky Mountain West and, of course, across the country that are in desperate need of those resources. And I'm happy to let any of the witnesses respond.

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Thank you, Chairman. I will start. Yes, the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program, a billion dollars between both provisions is an absolutely historic investment in community wildfire protection plans and the projects that are named within them. And we have a spotlight on getting this grant program up and running.

We are working—the Department of the Interior, Forest Service, and the National Association of State Foresters—hand-in-hand to develop the guidelines and get the program out. We anticipate those guidelines being ready by May. We hope to have the funding opportunity announced in June and get some of the first grants out by September. So, less than a year to put together a brand-new program at that level I think is really, really important.

The other thing that we are doing is we are contemplating what I would call kind of a base capacity level funding for each state so that they do have their resources to be able to carry out the program. So, I turn to my colleague, Mr. Rupert, to add anything.

Mr. RUPERT. Well, I will just add that Interior very much appreciates the work of the Forest Service. That Community Defense Grant support is directed at the Forest Service, and we appreciate the collaboration and the leadership that they are providing for that work, including us as well. Thank you.

Mr. NEGUSE. Thank you both, and I will just simply say we look forward to working with you and seeing the fruits of your labor materialize here, certainly in my communities and communities across the country. And not to belabor the point, but I do think Mr. Tiffany raises a good point that these programs have to be in coordination with our local communities. So, I suspect that that's of heavy emphasis for each of your agencies. But it is something to keep in mind. With that, the Chair will now recognize Mr. Gallego from Arizona for 5 minutes.

Mr. GALLEGO. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning to each of our witnesses for your time today. As you all know, wildfire is an issue that is always top of mind in Arizona. In the first 3 months of 2022, there have already been around 90 fires in the state. Dry conditions indicate that the 2022 fire season will start earlier than normal. Large parts of the state face abnormally dry drought conditions and fine fuels are anticipated to be above average.

Through all these issues, it is vital that we be prepared to manage fires and increase resilience. I am hopeful that funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will help make that happen. My first question is for Deputy Chief Hall-Rivera. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directed \$20 million to the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institute to create and maintain a national fuel treatment database and to publish a report every 5 years. What is the Forest Service's strategy for ensuring that data is entered consistently and reflects Congress' investments in our Federal lands?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Thank you, Congressman, for that question. We actually just had a meeting with the Institutes last week and are excited to get into this partnership together. Of course, we work very closely with the SWERIs already, but this is an added investment and a focus on something that the New Mexico University piloted and that now we are going to be able to expand to the rest of the country.

So, we are going to be working with them very closely, primarily our research branch. And they will be co-developing how we are going to expand that project. And then we will work together with our regions to ensure that we have the right kind of data and the data standards to ensure that that can be successful across the country.

Mr. GALLEG0. Thank you. My next question is for Mr. Ferebee. The Department of the Interior's wildfire spend plan identified several different criteria to inform fuels work and prioritize BIL funding, including the retention of large trees and fire-resilient stands and limits on permanent and temporary road construction. How will USFS projects ensure the protection and conservation of wilderness and roadless areas?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. As stated in our strategy, our strategy focuses on community exposure. So, we are in that footprint in close proximity to those areas, which is what we consider our managed lands, which is not in our roadless areas and our wilderness areas.

So, by the way our strategies are aligned and how we are looking to focus, we are not looking to focus in those areas when it comes to mitigation of exposure to our communities. In addition to that, what I would say is our intent is to meet the provisions in the intent of all the provisions in this legislation. And all of our projects are designed with an ecological frame in mind while they may also be trying to achieve other outcomes and so very much committed to meeting the intent of other laws like the Wilderness Act and our requirements when it comes to managing roadless areas.

Mr. GALLEG0. Thank you. My final question can be answered by either Forest Service witness. With \$4.5 billion of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act directed toward wildfire and forest provisions, significantly new funding and important programs are expected to be implemented by the Forest Service.

Does the Forest Service have adequate staff capacity to fulfill the new dollars they will be responsible with implementing, and how does the Forest Service plan to address staffing capacities with new hiring? Thank you.

Mr. FEREBEE. As a part of our strategy, we are working with our field to really identify what we think are the skillsets that are needed in order to deliver on this work. What I would also like to highlight, though, is as we talked about in this community already, this is an all-lands issue.

So, while we are the agency working on our capacity needs, we are also having conversations with our Federal partners, our state partners, tribes, and NGOs in this same space because if we are going to address this issue and address it at scale from an all-lands perspective, it is going to require all of us to have the capacity that we need and to the degree that we don't have it, working closely together in kind of a collaborative form really helps us leverage our collective resources as well.

The Agency has very much developed a strategy to look at hiring our needs but, at the same time, looking at how we show up with the rest of our partners in this all-lands issue.

Mr. GALLEG0. Ms. Rivera? Ms. Rivera, do you have anything to add?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. I don't have anything to add, sir.

Mr. GALLEG0. I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Utah, Mr. Moore.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you, Chair, Ranking Member. And thank you all for joining us today. We are rapidly approaching another wild-fire season. Like last year, and the year before, and the year before, we have done little to nothing to fundamentally improve the way we manage our lands to prevent catastrophic wildfires. One key fundamental point, Utahans feel this every day in the summer as we inhale smoke from California and Oregon. That is at the root of what I am really trying to do here. I am trying to improve this.

I introduced the FIRESHEDS Act and co-sponsored Ranking Member Westerman's Resilient Federal Forests Act to fundamentally improve the way our lands are managed. We can prevent these out-of-control fires that threaten our communities. We can prevent them.

For Mr. Rupert—Why do you think it is important to enhance shared stewardship agreements, adopt fireshed research and mapping, and extend the Good Neighbor Authority in our fight against fire?

Mr. RUPERT. Well, there has been reference to tools in the toolbox over the course of the day and, certainly, Good Neighbor Authority, shared stewardship and, yes, improved data standards and using technology to inform decision making pre-fire, during fire, post-fire. All of those are important tools to ultimately changing the trajectory that we are on and reducing risk of wildfire to local communities. Those were all parts and pieces.

Mr. MOORE. Yes. And our fundamental argument with the FIRESHEDS Act is that Utah has experienced some success here. Like, let's take what we do here and let's share this with other states. These shared stewardship agreements, they are designed to reduce the amount of bureaucracy to just work together, and each state can work with their Federal agencies.

Ms. Hall-Rivera, can you describe for us what actions private forest owners take to protect their lands against catastrophic wildfire?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes. Thank you for that question, Congressman. Many private forest landowners do treatment on their landscapes and around their homes to help protect against fire. And we have programs in the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior that help support that, working through our state foresters. But we also know that not every landowner has access to those programs. Our underserved communities may not be aware of those programs or may not have the capacity to, say, do grant-writing. So, we are working together with the National Association of State Foresters and many of our other partners to ensure that private landowners know about these programs, they have access to Service foresters who can help them do plans for their forests and to ensure that we can distribute funding like through the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program more broadly.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you. I will just point out that there are a lot of tools at private owners' disposal. And the NEPA regulations that we do sometimes make it impossible for them to do something good and to get past this. This is an argument that we make. We must take a close look at how we can improve NEPA so that it doesn't discourage the kind of management behaviors that our Federal lands desperately need.

Mr. Ferebee, as I understand it, the Forest Service has been contributing to help fund wildfire corridor projects in coordination with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. As you look to expand this engagement, what efforts, if any, are currently underway to integrate big-game wildlife corridors in National Forest Systems projects?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. As a part of our strategy, we acknowledge there are a number of values that are important to us to achieve with our work. While we are looking at mitigating exposure to communities, things like improving habitat for wildlife species, protecting big-game corridors, helping with recovery of T&E species, protecting critical watersheds, all of those are values that we are also looking to achieve as a result of our work.

Mr. MOORE. Thank you. Sir, I have never officially asked three different people three questions within my 5-minute timeline, so this is a monumental day for me, and I want to thank you all for being a part of this. The point that I wanted to—

Mr. NEGUSE. It is not likely to happen again.

Mr. MOORE. The point that I want to just reiterate is there is a lot of good going on. And I asked people—Utah, and as I have stepped into this role, I have seen so much good collaboration taking place in Utah from conservation to wildlife protection across the board. We want to limit emissions and toxins being put into our atmosphere, into our air.

And it is all the work that we are doing on our wildfire work. And we have had great results. We are not perfect, but we have had great results that I know other states can incorporate. I encourage the Majority to take a really sincere look at the

FIRESHEDS Act to look at what the true cause of this is, and we can get out ahead of this if we were to take an objective and not political look at it. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair will now recognize for 5 minutes Ms. Porter from California if she is on.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Ms. Hall-Rivera, you have testified in this Committee previously about the challenges with wildland firefighter hiring. How many firefighters does the Forest Service need to hire so you have no idle engines, you have fully staffed hotshot crews, and so on? What is the full staff number?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. Our goal this year in the Forest Service is 11,300 firefighters. And that is an increase—

Ms. PORTER. What do you have right now?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, I can't tell you the exact number we have right now, Congresswoman. I can get back to you on that. We are still bringing people on. Of course, it is the time of year where our temporary and even our permanent seasonal firefighters are onboarding. And we just completed an additional fire hire event in California at the end of March, and those numbers are still coming in.

Ms. PORTER. And how did that fire hire event go? Do you think you are on pace to have the number to be fully staffed in California? Do you think you are on pace for that based on the hiring event?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Congresswoman, yes. I do think we are on pace. And by all accounts, that hiring event went very well. And, importantly, what we are seeing is a very high acceptance rate in our permanent and seasonally permanent firefighting positions, which is what we want. We want to be able to convert this workforce to have more or a larger proportion of it be permanent and a smaller proportion of it be temporary.

We are in the same boat as a lot of sectors in this country where hiring is difficult and labor is short. But by all accounts, these events are going well, and we think that we will be at the capacity that we need in the Forest Service this year.

Ms. PORTER. That is really great to hear because, as you know, last year, according to the National Federation of Federal Employees, about 30 percent of the Federal hotshot crews that worked on the front lines of wildfires in California were understaffed. Last year, the Forest Service had 60 fire engines in California alone that were idle because of understaffing. So, I am very heartened to hear a concrete number or concrete goal for what full staffing looks like, the fact that, in general, recognizing that everybody faces labor challenges, and in general, you feel like hiring is going well. And I am hoping to see that a year from now in the outcome. And I am hoping to have a number of idle engines and the number of partially staffed, unstaffed crews go down. If you don't hit that target—I really appreciate, again, you giving that number. Where do you get the people power when you don't have enough firefighters? What happens when you don't have enough Federal firefighters?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, as we have talked about, Congresswoman, fire is an all-lands challenge. And we take an all-lands approach or a multi-jurisdictional approach to fire suppression as well. And we always have done that in this country. We are able to flux our numbers of firefighters across the country. The couple of different ways that we do that are: One, contractors. Department of the Interior and the Forest Service, we both employ contractors, and we can staff up using that mechanism.

We also, in both of our agencies, have employees who are not full-time firefighters that do have fire qualifications. They have what is called a red card. And we can bring them on during high periods of fire activity. We also have an authority called "administratively determined," which allows us to bring on others. They tend to be people who are retired or otherwise no longer engaged in the firefighting. But they are red-carded, and we are allowed to bring them on. So, we can surge. We had upwards of, what, 29,000 firefighters on the landscape last year during our highest levels of activity.

Ms. PORTER. Do you ever have to hire local fire departments or CAL FIRE, and how much did you spend at Forest Service last year on borrowing resources from local or state fire departments?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. We have agreements with state and local firefighters all over the country. We have a particularly robust agreement with California. It is called the California Fire Assistance Agreement. And Interior is part of that as well. And we are able to activate local and volunteer fire departments through that agreement, and it is reciprocal. They go on our fires. We go on their fires. It is a really great example of intergovernmental cooperation in the fire space.

Ms. PORTER. Just reclaiming my time, Ms. Hall-Rivera, would you be able to later provide the cost of those reciprocal agreements? I know they are complicated, but if you could provide a cost number to the Committee. Is that something you would be able to do later?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes, Congresswoman. We would be happy to do that.

Ms. PORTER. And Mr. Rupert, could you do the same thing, please, for the Department of the Interior?

Mr. RUPERT. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you. I really appreciate it. My last question was just to ask Mr. Ferebee. Could you just say briefly, particularly for Southern California, what you think the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill is going to be doing to benefit our community?

Mr. FEREBEE. Yes. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman. Our strategy is really looking at critical firesheds that are based on a lot of fire history as well as ignition sources and vegetative communities. And the intent of that is really to mitigate exposure to communities like those in Southern California.

So, we want to place an effort and emphasis in those firesheds working very closely with counties, states, and tribal governments as well as a number of other partners in the community to determine where we should be treating within those firesheds to make a difference.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentlelady yields back.

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

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Ferebee, the Forest Service used to have what was called the 10 a.m. rule. It was basically an informal policy that any fire spotted would be put out by 10 o'clock the next morning.

We had the Tamarack Fire last year in Alpine County. A lightning bolt struck a tree. That tree smoldered on about a quarter of an acre for about 10 days. Every day, the Forest Service had helicopters flying over to take pictures for Facebook but never bothered to drop a bucket of water or put the damn thing out. On the 10th day, it exploded, took out 70,000 acres, devastating the local community, which depends upon tourism, cost a number of families their homes. What in the world were you people thinking?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Mr. McClintock. And I will allow my colleague, Ms. Rivera, to address that.

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes, I would be happy to talk about that. Thank you, Congressman, for that question. The Tamarack Fire is one of those challenges that we have when we have hundreds of large fires on the landscape, and we are at preparedness levels—

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Wait a second. Wait a second, though. This was a fire that could have been put out with one aerial drop and maybe a ground crew. Instead, you allowed it to explode to 70,000 acres that cost us millions and millions of dollars to combat and did enormous damage not only to the forest but the surrounding communities. Why aren't we getting on top of these fires when they first break out, when we can easily put them out, rather than waiting for them to explode? And this is not the first time this has happened. This happened over and over again. This happened on Park Service land as well. We had the Reading Fire about a decade ago. Same thing. On the very same fire footprint as the Tamarack, we had the Woodfords Fire about 30 years ago. Same thing exactly. Small fire breaks out. In that case, the local fire department came to put it out and were told to go away by the Forest Service.

This is insane. Please tell me that you are dropping that policy and that you will be vigorously attacking fires on their initial discovery rather than waiting for them to become these massive conflagrations.

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes, Congressman. We put out 98 percent of fires on initial attack. And the Tamarack Fire is one of those 2 percent that we were not able to do that because we were resource-limited, and—

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. But you knew about it. You deliberately sat on it. And, again, not the first time this has happened. This happened over and over again. That was the cause of the disastrous Yellowstone Fires in 1988 when the Reagan administration rescinded the let-burn policy, and then you put it back after the Reagan administration left.

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Well, let me assure you, Congressman, we do not have the let-burn policy in the Forest Service. We manage every fire. We monitor every fire.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Can you assure me that henceforth, upon discovery of a fire, you will order an aggressive initial attack?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes, Congressman. That is what we do.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. All right. Thank you. Next question involves the management of our forests. We used to send foresters out every year to mark off surplus timber. We then auctioned that timber off for bid. We actually made money on those timber auctions. Logging companies paid us to come in to remove that excess timber and 25 percent of those revenues went to the local communities directly affected. The other 75 percent went back to the Forest Service for forest management.

We passed laws in the 1970s that made the thinning of our forests endlessly time-consuming and ultimately cost-prohibitive. The millions of dollars that it takes to do the environmental impact reports now costs more than the value of the timber. So, not a lot is getting done. We got a categorical exclusion from NEPA for the Tahoe Basin for projects up to 10,000 acres. The Forest Service has been using that very, very effectively. I think that is what saved South Lake Tahoe from the Caldor Fire. When that fire hit the treated portion under that new authority, which was assigned in 2016, the fire lay down. They were able to extinguish it before it took out the city of South Lake Tahoe. Can't we do that throughout the Forest Service system? It is a proven success. Why don't we extend that throughout the Forest Service?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. And to your question, yes. We can do that across the National Forest System lands. We are using a number of category exclusions, if you will. And you—

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. What I have been told, this categorical exclusion takes the review process from 4 years down to less than 4 months. Takes the EIR from about 800 pages down to about 20 pages and actually gets stuff done. Will the Forest Service support legislation to extend this provision across all Forest Service lands?

Mr. FEREBEE. The Agency is currently using them to the degree that we absolutely can. We would support working with you on any future legislation that enhances the tools that we have to really address the needs we have when it comes to managing the national forest.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Great. Thank you.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair will now recognize Ms. Tlaib from Michigan for 5 minutes.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you so much, Chair. Thank you all for the witnesses for today that are here. One of the things I want to talk about is how our agencies are implementing Justice40 in delivering benefits to disadvantaged communities, or what I call my frontline communities like the ones I represent, because I think many folks across our nation will wonder how wildlife management and ecosystem restoration impacts them.

Mr. Rupert, I will start with you. How is the Department of the Interior incorporating Justice40 Initiative into consideration of certain projects using the infrastructure funding?

Mr. RUPERT. Yes, thank you. In Interior, up to this point, as we have begun to focus work on implementing infrastructure, we have taken it program by program, so many different provisions of infrastructure crossing multiple programs in Interior, looking at programs for opportunities to highlight and promote Justice40. And

then as the Administration has been working at an all-of-government level to develop support and tools, and we will interact with those tools as they come online to provide that focused priorities for it.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you. Mr. Ferebee or Ms. Hall-Rivera, is the Forest Service also incorporating the Justice40 Initiative into their 10-Year Wildlife Plan in infrastructure implementation?

Mr. FEREBEE. Yes, we are. Today, we have identified cover programs within our organization. We have identified priorities that would benefit tribes, underserved communities, and disadvantaged communities as well and have developed indicators to help us track how we are progressing in that arena and, as well, develop implementation plan that will help modify how we currently show up so that we can serve those communities better as we would like.

Ms. TLAIB. Well, one of my concerns about the Infrastructure Bill is that it did strip requirements out of the National Environmental Protection Act, NEPA, that will fast-track certain projects without full environmental reviews. Are you all aware of that?

Mr. FEREBEE. No. I am not—I am not sure, Congresswoman.

Ms. TLAIB. Well, Mr. Ferebee, the Department of the Interior's wildlife spend plan identifies several different criterias to inform its work and prioritize infrastructure funding, the first of which is a completed National Environmental Policy, you know, NEPA compliance. How has NEPA worked to protect critical species habitat and conservation areas as well as prioritize project work? Just want to show my colleagues how important it is.

Mr. FEREBEE. So, the Forest Service has equal criteria, if you will, that we are using when it comes to implementing this work as it relates to our strategy. One is to ensure that we are compliant with NEPA. The other one is we meet the intent of the BIL itself. And third, we want to make sure that the work that we are looking to invest in aligns with the science that we have informing where we should be investing.

Ms. TLAIB. I know NEPA is important even in frontline community like mine. They are building an international bridge crossing how NEPA can actually help mitigate some of the issues regarding air quality. And I don't know if this is for Mr. Ferebee or Ms. Hall-Rivera—But how many projects or acres have been completed under NEPA compliance that you are all aware of?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman. I can't give you exact acres or the number of projects. What I can assure you is that all the projects that we implement at the ground level have met our NEPA compliance requirement.

Ms. TLAIB. Yes. That is what I am afraid of is there are no exceptions. So, it is clear to me that our work didn't end with the Infrastructure Bill. To any of the witnesses, how would the investments in the House-passed Build Back Better Act allow your agencies to continue to address climate, wildlife, and community needs. Do you believe the investments beyond infrastructure might be necessary to achieve desired outcomes?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman. We are very appreciative of the financial support and the provisions within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. And as we have indicated, we acknowledge that given the level of treatment that is

needed in the scale of the issue, we acknowledge that the BIL, in and of itself, is a great down payment toward achieving that work.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you, Chairman. I yield.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentlewoman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Rosendale from Montana for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I assure you that we in Montana are very concerned about forest management.

Mr. NEGUSE. And we welcome you to the Committee.

Mr. ROSENDALE. It impacts our air quality, our water quality, our economy, and just our way of life. So, it is critically important to us. Mr. Rupert and Ms. Hall-Rivera, could you tell me how many timber sales in the Montana area or the U.S. Forest Service Region 1 are currently stalled due to litigation?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. I will take that question, Congressman. I don't have that number, but I can ask our team to get that for you.

Mr. ROSENDALE. And I am assuming that you wouldn't have the acreage that that would cover as well?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. No, I don't. But I know that we can easily get that information for you.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK. Well, you might be interested to know, it took me many months to get that, probably about 6 months to be exact. Finally, it was provided to me. In Montana, 27 timber sales are currently tied up, totaling 188 million board feet of timber. In Region 1, Montana and Idaho combined, that number jumps to 41 sales tied up or 438.35 million board feet of timber that is being tied up and not being brought to market, nor out of the forest to help keep our forests healthy.

That is approximately 35,162 acres that are tied up in litigation in Region 1 completely stalling proper forest management. I am glad to see there was funding included in the Infrastructure Bill for forest management. But to be completely candid with you, that money is going to do squat if it can't be spent because all these projects are tied up with litigation. I have attended and gone into the field and visited Lubrecht Research Lab, which is a forest management operation, and have seen the difference between forest that is properly managed through mechanical treatment, through fire treatment, through both fire and mechanical treatment and forest that has not been touched at all.

And not only does it make for very unhealthy conditions for the forests, and the trees themselves are unhealthy, but it creates an incredible fire hazard. And these are some of the things that are leading to the very fires that are out of control that my colleagues here have been talking about. What must I do to get the support of you folks sitting here today on forest management litigation reform such as the legislation that I introduced in H.R. 4579?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. While I am not aware exactly what your piece of legislation entails, we would be more than happy to work with you. The Agency is very interested in having all the tools possible for us to be able to address the active management need that we see on the landscape to mitigate or induce the kind of wildfires that we are experiencing.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Again, we know what it requires, proper management. We have seen it demonstrated in the field. It is not rocket

science. No offense. We just need it to be implemented. And the only way that we are going to be able to implement it is if we have proper litigation reform. And that is where I need your support.

Does the Endangered Species Act have any impact on forest management?

Mr. FEREBEE. So, the Endangered Species Act is one of the many legal requirements that our agency is obligated to meet the intent of. And our agency is about the sustainability of all of our natural resources. That includes species that are covered under that Act.

Mr. ROSENDALE. I understand that. But, again, does the Endangered Species Act negatively impact the proper management of our forests?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, Congressman. I can't say that it negatively impacts. I would just say it is a condition of which we have to consider in the management of our activities when we are planning projects.

Mr. ROSENDALE. So, the habitat that is located in a healthy forest, we certainly would be able to manage the wildlife population as well. If we have a forest that is not properly managed, we have fuels build up. We have a wildfire take place. It completely sterilizes the soil because it has burned so hot. It then creates problems with erosion, water quality problems, fisheries problems. Again, I will ask—Do you not think that that negatively impacts the habitat and the very species that we are trying to preserve?

Mr. FEREBEE. Thank you for the question, again, Congressman. The way that you described that lastly, I would say, yes, we have experienced a number of post-fire situations that is not conducive to resilient landscapes or habitat for wildlife.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Mr. Chair, I see that my time has expired, so I would yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Gohmert, for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here today. Last year, we sent a letter to the Forest Service asking about boat ramps on Lake Sam Rayburn in my district, which I am sure you are familiar with the history of the national forests, but local/state governments were assured that by providing land that could not be taxed and would not be used for commercial purposes that the U.S. Forest Service would share 25 percent of the proceeds of the timber harvesting with the local government.

Back in the 1980s, for example, Sabine County had \$1.6 million as their shared portion. Very rural county. But in recent years, it has dropped as low as 60,000. And then with the so-called stewardship program, I know, according to Mr. Westerman, it has been helpful in Arkansas. But in East Texas, it seems to be used to hide money from being shared with local government.

We run into problems like, where a culvert is, a bridge goes down. A culvert becomes impassible. But it is as if the U.S. Forest Service likes the area being unable to traverse for local residents. We have boat ramps that have ceased being used. And it took over 4 months, but we got a response: "boat ramp is not sustainable from a structural or financial perspective" and that "using volunteers is neither safe nor practical".

And in case you are not familiar, we don't have any sequoias or redwoods. We have pine trees. And newer pine trees actually sequester more carbon, if you are not familiar. So, it ends up being one of our best renewable resources—20, 25 years, you plant pine trees, and they are back in East Texas. They can be harvested. The older they get, the less carbon they sequester.

But it just seems that, regardless of the administration, the U.S. Forest Service is doing a great disservice to East Texas and other places. The trees are not being harvested, the resources not being renewed. And we had a deputy in San Augustine County chase a criminal into the national forest but stopped in order to get permission. And he was in hot pursuit. I think it was about 5 days later, after lots of screaming by a lot of us, that someone was sent from Arizona to come check things out and was surprised to find the most sophisticated marijuana growing area that they had ever experienced.

But because of the lack of assistance from U.S. Forest Service aiding and abetting the getaway of those who constructed the marijuana growing service, they got a little ahead of the game of it being legalized. They were free to go to some other national forest and again continue to engage in criminality. So, we haven't gotten a whole lot of help, nor a lot of cooperation, out of the U.S. Forest Service.

And if we get an Administration so amenable, I am going to be pushing hard to get land given back to local communities so that they don't continue in their struggle just to survive because the U.S. Forest Service has become so blasé about doing what it originally agreed to do. I realize I have 10 seconds left and haven't arrived at a question. But I wanted to make sure that you knew how unpalatable the U.S. Forest Service has become in East Texas. And we are hoping that we can bring it to an end unless you turn about very quickly in helping the local area instead of hurting it. I yield back.

Mr. NEGUSE. The gentleman yields back. I give the witnesses an opportunity to respond if they would like to. But if not, we will proceed.

Mr. GOHMERT. I didn't realize I made a question there. So, yes, thanks for extending my time.

Mr. NEGUSE. My pleasure.

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. I would like to respond because I think the points that you brought up are very important, Congressman. And I would say all of our leaders in the field pride themselves on their relationships that they have with their state and local partners. But it is not always perfect, and we can do better. So, it is important that we heard your concerns, and I can commit that we will work on those in Texas. I think our district rangers and our forest supervisor there are always going to be wanting to improve their relationships. I can assure you of that.

Mr. GOHMERT. Would you understand when someone is in hot pursuit, taking 5 days to give permission is really not helpful, right? And when you shut down the boat ramps that would help provide fishing tournaments, things like that, some source for the economy, and you continue to shut them down, shut down camping

areas, that is not what the locals consider to be extremely cooperative. You get that, right?

Ms. HALL-RIVERA. Yes. I understand what you are saying, Congressman.

Mr. GOHMERT. Well, we would love to hear a better response than, no, it's just not going to work out.

Mr. NEGUSE. Aren't you glad that I gave the witnesses an opportunity to respond?

Mr. GOHMERT. I appreciate it.

Mr. NEGUSE. Before we conclude with this witness panel, are there any other Members who have not had their 5 minutes and who wish to seek recognition to ask questions now. Do we have anybody virtually?

Hearing none, I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions. Look, these are tough issues and so no shortage of very nuanced and difficult questions and, I think, thorough and insightful answers. We appreciate the partnership. And we will look forward to continuing to work with the Administration on these issues and more.

The members of the Committee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. And we will ask you to respond to those in writing. Under Committee Rule 3(o), members of the Committee must submit witness questions within 3 business days following this hearing. And the hearing record will be held open for 10 business days for these responses.

If there is no other further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Statement for the Record

**J. Morgan Varner, PhD
Director of Research
Tall Timbers**

On behalf of Tall Timbers, we thank the Committee for its interest in prescribed fire. Management of fire in our nations forests and rangelands is a tremendous challenge as we face the complications of a changing climate and past land management that failed to recognize the benefits of fire. We hope that we can work with the Committee to find solutions to use prescribed fire as a way to reshape and restore our forests for reduced wildfire risk and a more resilient future.

Tall Timbers is a non-governmental research organization with over 60-years of experience using prescribed fire science to solve land management problems. From the 1960s through today, we provide key leadership for proactive use of prescribed fire and research on how fires behave, what their ecological effects are, and how society interacts with fire-prone landscapes. Our unique perspective is rooted in a long-term practice of working cooperatively to conduct research and apply it to over a one million acres through a network of land managers in the Southeast US. Our mission is to foster exemplary land stewardship through research, conservation and education.

As the Director of Research at Tall Timbers, I see firsthand every day how we can prevent extreme fire using controlled burns. I also serve on California's Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force and share guidance on how controlled burns can enhance firefighting efforts in the west. In a time when there is no longer a fire season, all tools should be deployed, and we are pleased that the Forest Service and Department of Interior were given greater resources under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to address fire issues.

Tall Timbers is a long-time partner of the Forest Service, Department of Interior and other federal agencies. We are working with the Forest Service and Department of Interior on prescribed fire best practices and are awaiting guidance on how the \$500 million for prescribed fire as authorized in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will be implemented.

We also were pleased to hear that the members of the wildfire commission will be announced in the coming months. Hearing perspectives from outside the federal government is extremely helpful in providing a holistic view on what must be accomplished across the country to keep people safe and our ecosystems intact.

Workforce training is another critical piece of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that we are watching closely. We were excited to see that the Forest Service and Office of Personnel Management will develop a “wildland firefighter” occupational series. This is vital to ensure wildland firefighters have the tools they need to operate in at times life-threatening settings. Increasing the prescribed fire workforce via investments in training capacity and technologies for federal and state agencies and private land managers is critical to overcoming the backlog of lands in need of restoration and fuels management.

And finally, funding for data science is an ongoing critical need. Wildland fire research is a major need moving forward to enable the increases in pace and scale of prescribed fire and managed wildfires that federal land management agencies have prioritized. Increasing the budget to \$20 million for the multi-agency Fire and Smoke Model Evaluation Experiment (FAASME) will have a big impact on advancing the fire and smoke models that fire managers need for both prescribed fire and wildland fires.

We applauded the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law’s focus on wildfire and believe these funding increases and increased engagement opportunities for non-government stakeholders will create long-lasting benefits. Tall Timbers thanks this Subcommittee for its continued interest in wildfire management and providing transparency throughout implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Please view Tall Timbers as a partner on policy related to wildfire management.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute this feedback.

[LIST OF DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD RETAINED IN THE
COMMITTEE’S OFFICIAL FILES]

Letter from Jessica Turner, President at Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, expressing support for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act dated April 5, 2022.

