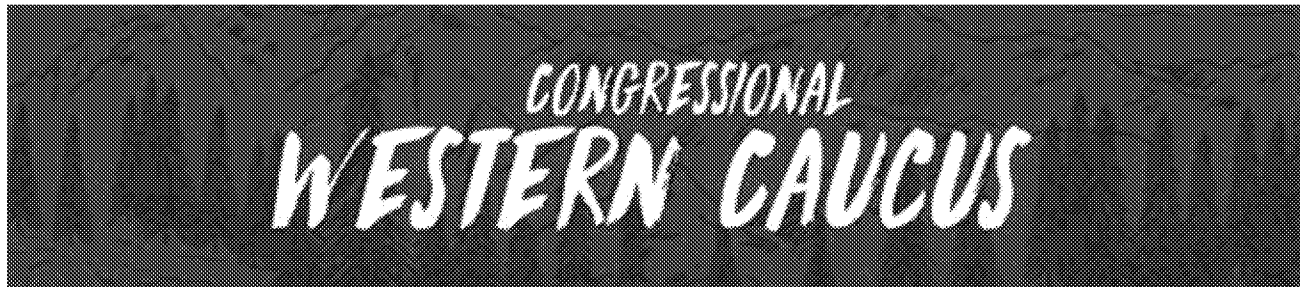


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Subject: Westerman's Forestry Reform Bill Passes House with Bipartisan Vote, is Sent to Senate



For Immediate Release
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Westerman's Forestry Reform Bill Passes House with Bipartisan Vote, is Sent to Senate



WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congressional Western Caucus Chairman **Paul A. Gosar D.D.S. (AZ-04)**, Speaker of the House **Paul Ryan (WI-01)**, House Majority Leader **Kevin McCarthy (CA-23)**, Chief Forestry Officer **Bruce Westerman (AR-04)**, Executive Vice Chairman **Scott Tipton (CO-03)**, Chief Rules Officer **Dan Newhouse (WA-04)**, Chief Defense and Interior Officer **Chris Stewart (UT-02)**, Chairman Emeritus **Steve Pearce (NM-02)**, House Conference Chair **Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA-05)**, and Members Reps. **Doug Collins (GA-09)**, **Kristi Noem (SD-AL)**, **Kurt Schrader (OR-05)**, **Mimi Walters (CA-45)**, **Paul Cook (CA-**

08), Jeff Denham (CA-10), Doug LaMalfa (01), Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson (PA-05), Doug Lamborn (CO-05), Tom Emmer (MN-06), Liz Cheney (WY-AL), and Greg Gianforte (MT-AL) issued statements following passage on the House Floor of Rep. Westerman’s H.R. 2936, the Resilient Federal Forests Act:

Congressman Gosar said, “Today, the House has taken a major step forward in making our federal forests healthy again. We have demonstrated our commitment to halting the practice of fire borrowing so that the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service don’t have to rob fire prevention accounts in order to finance fire suppression. And we have finally passed reforms that will clear the way for proactive forestry management by the Forest Service once again. The cumulative effect of these actions will be that in a few years’ time, absurd phrases like ‘wildfire season’ and astronomical figures like \$2.5 billion dollars spent on nearly nine million acres burnt will sound like made-up fictions. But before that can happen, the Senate needs to take a vote and the President has to put his signature on my friend Congressman Westerman’s great bill.”

Speaker Ryan stated, "The Resilient Federal Forests Act addresses the obstructionist litigation by requiring litigants opposing forest management activity to come to the table rather than just saying “no.” The legislation also incentivizes and rewards collaboration and encourages local participation in forest health projects. This legislation also fixes the fire “borrowing” issue, making sure these agencies have the funds they need to fight wildfires throughout the summer, and to start managing our forests proactively.”

Majority Leader McCarthy said, “Our federal forests are a tinderbox, and our current policy of neglect and over litigation created the conditions for wildfires. I’ve visited the results of this neglect, seen the communities wiped of the map, and walked through completely destroyed forests. In my own district, the Erskine Fire burned over 48,000 acres last year and destroyed nearly 300 homes.

“This year has proven to be another catastrophic year for wildfires,” **Congressman Westerman** said. “Dozens of lives have been lost, thousands of homes destroyed, and millions of acres burned. Congress spoke today and said enough is enough. We must give the Forest Service the tools it needs to stop these fires before they start. We must end the practice of fire borrowing and treat wildfires as the natural disasters they are, funding recovery efforts through FEMA. We must do what is right for our environment and stop these catastrophic wildfires. I thank Speaker Ryan, Leader McCarthy, and Chairman Bishop for their leadership on this issue and I thank my co-sponsors on both sides of the aisle.”

“Devastating wildfires have ravaged the West, taking lives, destroying property and causing significant damage to our precious environment. These large wildfires are the result of decades of misguided forest management strategies, which have left federal land management agencies focused on firefighting rather than on managing forests to reduce these types of catastrophic fires in the first place,” said **Congressman Tipton**. “The Resilient Federal Forests Act will take necessary steps to reverse this trend by streamlining the permitting process for management activities such as removing dead and downed timber, and allowing agencies to work with local experts to proactively mitigate devastating insect infestations.”

“My constituents know as well as anyone the immense threat that wildfires pose to local communities. In just the past four years, the 4th District of Washington has seen the two largest fires in state history. We have lost hundreds of homes, business, and structures. My constituents are still struggling to recover from the Carlton Complex Fire in 2014 and the Okanogan Complex Fire in 2015. The human toll has been high. Several residents have lost their lives, including three

firefighters in 2015. Active forest management is a matter of saving lives and livelihoods, of protecting our communities, and ensuring our constituents' healthy and safety, which is why I am proud to support passage of this legislation," stated **Congressman Newhouse**.

Congressman Stewart said: "Without a doubt, current federal policies have contributed to recent catastrophic wildfires. Wildfire management begins with proper land management. This bill reverses the tide of federal mismanagement and removes heavy handed regulations that have paralyzed forests managers for decades. I am proud that the House passed this legislation. Now the Senate must act to ensure we have healthy forests for generations to come."

"We in New Mexico are all too familiar with the economic and environmental devastation created by catastrophic wildfires," said **Congressman Pearce**. "How we manage our federal forests is badly in need of updating to ensure communities, watersheds, endangered species, local businesses, and firefighters are kept safe. We must increase and expedite forest thinning and other forest treatment projects to restore forest health across the country. Today's common sense bill will cut government red tape and streamline the approval processes for essential forest management projects to ensure our fire-prone, federal forests get the treatment they need."

"The Forest Service has warned us that our forests are in terrible shape," said **Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers**. "When you don't actively manage forests, diseased and dying trees serve as fuel for the next major fire. We've seen these catastrophic fires right here in Eastern Washington, and we must take action to protect our forests and reduce our risk of fire. This legislation proposes real solutions to create healthier, more resilient forests."

"Wildfires have threatened too many of our forests in northeast Georgia and around the country, so we're taking smart steps through the Resilient Federal Forests Act to get the federal agencies the tools they need to protect our land," said **Congressman Collins**.

"The years-long pine beetle epidemic has turned much of South Dakota's Black Hills into a tinder box," said **Congresswoman Noem**. "We are fortunate to have so many dedicated foresters working in this area, and I'm proud to have scored some critical victories in support of their efforts over the years. The *Resilient Federal Forests Act* would put additional tools at their disposal. With the House's stamp of approval, I strongly urge the Senate to take the legislation up quickly and allow these critical resources to be deployed."

"Wildfire disasters don't typically receive as much national attention as other natural disasters," said **Congressman Schrader**. "But all corners of the country watched as the fires out west devastated homes and communities during this devastating wildfire season. Our current laissez-faire approach to forest management, with exclusively reactive efforts to fight increasingly horrific wildfires that threaten and destroy our communities is completely inadequate and becoming more and more costly. The bipartisan bill we passed today rewards communities that are proactive and collaborative in the stewardship of their forests, with rural advisory committees and wildfire protection plans to manage their forests without redundant NEPA processes. With this bill, we're empowering good leadership and good management, providing for research and development and innovation in renewable forest timber construction technologies, and bringing together environmental and timber communities. While this bill is by no means perfect, and is not a silver bullet, it's a step forward in the right direction as we work to curb the unnecessary and costly destruction caused by these fires."

Congresswoman Walters stated, "Three weeks ago, the Canyon Fire burned over 6,000 acres, destroyed 25 structures, damaged dozens more, and forced over 16,000 Orange County residents to evacuate their homes and businesses. The cost of extinguishing this wildfire and its economic

impact have yet to be determined, but it is clear that hazardous fuel buildup endangers communities and costs taxpayers more and more each year. The current federal wildfire management program is unsustainable. I am proud to have supported the Resilient Federal Forest Act to put our U.S. Forest Service on a fiscally responsible path that will undoubtedly save countless lives in the years to come.”

“This past year we’ve continued to see firsthand in California the devastating consequences of wildfires, both environmentally and economically. This critical bipartisan legislation will help reduce the threat of future wildfires by instituting reforms to improve forest management, improve wildlife habitat, and streamline the environmental review process,” said **Congressman Cook**.

“When we fail to actively manage our forests and federal lands, we put ourselves and our neighbors at risk. The Resilient Federal Forests Act will allow us to reduce the presence of forest materials – such as dead or disease-infested trees – that fuel massive wildfires. It also solves the fire-borrowing problem to improve our response to wildfire suppression. I applaud my colleagues in the House for passing this important bill to help protect Californians and all Americans from out-of-control burning of our forestlands,” said **Congressman Denham**.

Congressman LaMalfa said, “A complete lack of forest management has left our forests more combustible than ever – leaving our firefighters wholly unprepared to contain overwhelming wildfires that quickly get out of hand. Forest fires will occur, but we can take logical steps to manage them that will help prevent them from spreading and extinguish them more quickly – resulting in less damage and lower costs. The Resilient Federal Forests Act will allow the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to properly manage our federal forests, which will improve overall forest health and reduce the risk of such severe wildfires.”

“Our national forests are becoming increasingly overgrown with hazardous fuel due to lack of active management,” said **Congressman Thompson**. “The Resilient Federal Forests Act is a vital piece of legislation for the Forest Service, allowing for more authority and flexibility for improved forest management. As a member of both the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees, I understand how important it is we provide our Forest Service with the tools needed to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires, insect and disease infestation and damage to municipal watersheds. I applaud my colleagues for their support of this common-sense legislation to combat future forest fires.”

Congressman Lamorn said, “Wildfire funding is vital for western states, particularly my home of Colorado. I support legislation that protects our land and secures protection for our future. The Resilient Federal Forests Act speeds up the reforestation process, incentivizes collaboration among government and organizations, and creates new programs to effectively respond after a disastrous wildfire.”

“I am proud to support Congressman Westerman’s Resilient Federal Forests Act, to take a proactive approach to forest management and disaster mitigation. This legislation improves our ability to prepare for, and prevent, future wildfires and shifts the federal government away from its current practice of simply responding to crisis after crisis, costing billions of dollars and putting homes and American families at risk,” said **Congressman Emmer**.

Congresswoman Cheney stated, “This year has been one of the largest wildfire years in our nation's history and we have seen livelihoods across the west threatened. In my home state of Wyoming, we find ourselves in an indefensible situation. Mismanagement of our forests by the federal government and years of bad policy are causing and exacerbating fires, putting our forests,

our water, our wildlife, and, most importantly, our people at risk. The Resilient Federal Forest Act is an important first step and a bipartisan effort to begin to help improve management of our forests."

"The Resilient Federal Forests Act provides common sense reforms that will benefit Montana's forests, economy, and environment. Meaningful forest management will improve the health of our forests, boost wildlife habitats, create good-paying Montana jobs, and reduce the severity of our wildfires. The amount of public support for more active forest management has been tremendous. Conservation organizations, foresters, stakeholders, and local leaders throughout Montana recognize the need for better forest management, and I commend them for taking steps to help ensure we start managing our forests again. I will continue to advocate for healthier forests in Montana and throughout the West. I encourage the Senate to act quickly on this bill to provide Montanans with relief and a long-term solution to address catastrophic wildfires," concluded **Congressman Gianforte**.

Background:

Over the last decade, wildfires have overtaken the West. The underlying problems have gotten to be so severe that states which traditionally do not have wildfire problems are finding themselves having to reckon with thousands of acres burned, homes evacuated and the air filled with smoke.

Some figures drive this point home. 8.8 million acres burned across the United States this year alone, costing the United States Forest Service (USFS) \$2.5 billion dollars in fire suppression costs. Over 50,000 significant fires were burning this summer at once, and a total of 80 million acres were considered high-risk due to forest service lacking the resources to apply management to them beforehand.

The search for legislative solutions to the wildfire problem began from the ground-up in the 115th Congress. The House held multiple hearings and consulted dozens of experts in seeking to draft wildfire and management reform legislation. Environmental concerns and air quality were key factors throughout this process, with additional hearings devoted to these issues.

Two major problems were identified: for one, the USFS and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have encountered significant regulatory and judicial roadblocks to instituting the sort of active management of our forests that would reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfire.

But even if the aforementioned impediments were ameliorated, these agencies still faced a more significant problem: themselves. Because of the increasing costs of wildfires, USFS has been maxing out its suppression account each year and has been forced to raid its forest management and other accounts in order to put out fires. They've had to use resources designed to *prevent* forest fires in order to *put them out*. This merry-go-round practice is called "fire borrowing," and it has dramatically exacerbated the problem of catastrophic wildfires.

Congressman Bruce Westerman's H.R. 2936, the Resilient Federal Forests Act, provides solutions for each of these systemic issues. His bill is a package of forest management reforms that include regulatory expedition for forest management projects, a new arbitration pilot program for court cases in which an injunction against forest management projects is sought, as well as new incentives for agencies to coordinate with state and local governments to seek forest management solutions. The net effect of these reforms will be to reduce the barriers to proactive forest management while preserving environmental protections and the legal right to recompense for harm or breach.

Finally, his bill introduces a new funding mechanism for catastrophic wildfire disasters. H.R. 2936 would establish a wildfire sub-account within FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. Subject to Congressional appropriations, the new account would lie untouched and separate from other disaster funding until wildfire suppression costs expend all of the funds in BLM or USFS's own accounts. The bill would prohibit these agencies from engaging in "fire borrowing," and instead establishes a process whereby the Secretaries of Interior or Agriculture request of the President a transfer of funds in the amount required to cover suppression costs.

A list of outside support for the bill can be found [HERE](#). Bill text is [HERE](#). Click [HERE](#) to read more background information about the bill courtesy the House Natural Resources Committee.

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