

January 15, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1334 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Scott Peters
Congressman
U.S. House of Representatives
1201 Longworth Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for the Fix Our Forests Act

Dear Chairman Westerman and Congressman Peters:

The undersigned organizations support the Fix Our Forests Act. Thank you for introducing this important bipartisan legislation and for your leadership to address forest health needs and wildfire challenges. Improving the health of our nation's forested lands and protecting communities and watersheds is critically import.

We represent a broad coalition of stakeholders that includes water providers, farmers, utilities, forestry professionals, and local governmental entities. We are deeply committed to advancing forest and watershed health. We support the Fix our Forests Act and its comprehensive approach to improving forest and watershed health. Enacting this legislation will help protect our communities and address forest health needs by fostering collaboration between federal agencies, local communities, and tribal nations, authorizing common sense environmental streamlining authorities, providing targeted litigation reform, expanding good neighbor authorities, and investing in data sharing, research, and technology.

Communities nationwide continue to face widespread destruction caused by intense wildfires. The USDA reported last year that more than one-third of the U.S. population and buildings—roughly 115 million people and 48 million buildings—are in high wildfire risk counties.¹In 2024, 61,685 fires burned 8,851,142 acres the seventh most acres burned in the last two decades.² Wildfire is an important part of a healthy ecosystem. However, the catastrophic wildfires that are becoming more common often burn with a severity that falls outside historic norms³. Catastrophic fires threaten public health and safety and adversely affect community resilience and infrastructure. Catastrophic fires

¹ U.S. Forest Service: *Updates to Wildfirerisk.org Identify Communities with Increased Risk and Provide Resources to Mitigate Wildfire*. May 28, 2024. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/updates-wildfire-risk-tool-advance-understanding-wildfire-vulnerabilities>

² NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, Monthly Wildfires Report for Annual 2024, published online January 2025, retrieved on January 15, 2025 from <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/monthly-report/fire/202413>.

³ Parks, Sean A.; Holsinger, Lisa M.; Blankenship, Kori; Dillon, Gregory K.; Goeking, Sara A.; Swaty, Randy. 2023. Contemporary wildfires are more severe compared to the historical reference period in western US dry conifer forests. *Forest Ecology and Management*. 544: 121232.

can also impact water supplies. Almost 90% of the people served by public water systems in the Western United States rely on federal forested lands for a portion of their water.⁴

Forest management resources included in the Fix Our Forests Act are crucial to help control and reduce the severity of wildfires to enhance air quality, wildlife habitat, and more. For example, this legislation would improve water supply sources such as drinking water and rivers, improve water quality by decreasing runoff, pollutants, and erosion, and save costs by reducing infrastructure repairs to reservoirs, pipelines, and treatment plants.

Once again, thank you for your leadership in addressing our nation's urgent wildfire management needs. Improvements made in the Fix Our Forests Act will provide lasting positive impacts on our communities, environment, and economy.

Respectfully,

American Farm Bureau Federation
American Forest Resource Council
Association of California Water Agencies
California Farm Bureau Federation
Family Farm Alliance
National Association of Counties

cc:

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee

⁴ Liu, Ning; Dobbs, G. Rebecca; Caldwell, Peter V.; Miniati, Chelcy F.; Sun, Ge; Duan, Kai; Nelson, Stacy A.C.; Bolstad, Paul V.; Carlson, Christopher P. 2022. Quantifying the role of National Forest System and other forested lands in providing surface drinking water supply for the conterminous United States. Gen. Tech. Rep. WO-100. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington Office. 40 p. [plus supplement]. <https://doi.org/10.2737/WO-GTR-100>.