

## House Committee on Natural Resources

### Oversight Hearing- Fix Our Forests: How Improved Land Management Can Protect Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface

15 May 2025

#### **Overview:**

The hearing reflected a bipartisan consensus on the urgency of wildfire mitigation. There is support for empowering local, state, and Tribal entities to act more quickly and effectively. The Fix Our Forests Act is seen as a solid foundation, but many members believe it must be paired with funding, workforce development, and regulatory reform to be fully effective.

#### **Key points:**

- Tribal governments are included in the Fix Our Forests Act as partners in shared stewardship agreements.
  - These agreements allow Tribal, state, and federal entities to collaboratively manage fire-prone landscapes across jurisdictional lines.
- [Representative Nick Begich \(R-AK\)](#) highlighted this as a “game changer” for rural areas like Alaska, where multiple entities manage the same land.
- [Chief Dan Munsey](#) (San Bernardino County Fire) emphasized the importance of bringing Tribal, federal, state, and local governments together to define shared goals and streamline permitting.
- No Tribal representatives testified, and there were no extended discussions of Tribal land management practices or sovereignty issues beyond the shared stewardship framework.
- Wildfire Crisis Scope
  - Wildfires are burning hotter, faster, and more unpredictably. Over 1 billion acres are at risk; 117 million federally owned acres are at high or very high risk.
  - [The Wildland-Urban Interface \(WUI\)](#)—where development meets wildland—is especially vulnerable, with 44 million homes at risk.
- Forest Management
  - There is bipartisan agreement that proactive forest management (e.g., thinning, prescribed burns, fuel breaks) is essential.
  - Witnesses and members criticized bureaucratic delays and regulatory hurdles (especially [NEPA](#)) that slow down mitigation projects.
  - Some Representatives emphasized the need to reverse policies like the [2001 Roadless Rule](#), which they argue restricts access and management.
- Built Environment & Insurance
  - Home hardening (fire-resistant materials, defensible space) is critical.
  - Insurance markets are destabilizing in high-risk areas; premiums are rising, and coverage is shrinking.

- The insurance industry supports mitigation to make homes more “insurable.”
- Technology & Innovation
  - Emerging tools include AI-enabled fire modeling, autonomous helicopters, and early detection systems.
  - The Fix Our Forests Act includes pilot programs to test and deploy wildfire tech.
- Workforce & Coordination
  - There is a shortage of qualified federal fire personnel.
  - Local and state fire departments are increasingly filling the gap.
  - Witnesses called for better interagency coordination and long-term investment in workforce development.