

House Natural Resource

State of Our Nation's Federal Forests

9 September 2025

Highlights:

The hearing focused on the state of federal forests, wildfire management, timber production, and the U.S. Forest Service's budget and staffing under the Trump Administration. [Tribal Forest Protection Act agreements](#) were highlighted and described as tools to strengthen Tribal collaboration in forest health and wildfire mitigation.

Witness: [U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz](#)

Key Points:

- Wildfire Crisis and Forest Health
 - The hearing centered on growing concerns about increasing wildfire risks across federal lands.
 - Members of Congress debated the root causes, with some attributing the crisis to insufficient forest management and others pointing to climate change.
 - There was broad support for expanding active forest management practices, including timber harvesting and prescribed burns.
- Budget & Staffing
 - Chief Schultz testified that the Trump Administration inherited a \$750 million budget shortfall from the previous administration.
 - As a result, the Forest Service implemented deferred resignation programs, which led to the departure of approximately 5,200 employees, including 1,400 red card holders qualified for wildfire response.
 - Chief Schultz referenced [Good Neighbor Authority](#) as one of the tools being used under the Trump Administration's executive order to expand timber production and improve forest management.
 - Specifically, he noted that the Forest Service is utilizing "...tools such as Good Neighbor Authority, stewardship contracting, and Tribal Forest Protection Act agreements..."
 - These mechanisms are being employed to increase timber targets, streamline permitting, and remove bureaucratic barriers to forest management.
 - Additionally, Chief Schultz later mentioned that managing roads under Good Neighbor Authority is one of the provisions in the Fix Our Forests Act that would be helpful to the Forest Service if expanded.
 - Members expressed differing views on whether current staffing levels are adequate to meet operational needs.
- Policy & Legislative Proposals

- Several members voiced support for the [Fix Our Forests Act](#), which aims to streamline environmental reviews and reduce litigation delays.
- The Trump Administration's proposal to repeal the [2001 Roadless Rule](#) was discussed for its ability to improve access and management flexibility.
- Additionally, there were calls to reform the [Equal Access to Justice Act](#) to limit lawsuits from environmental NGOs that are perceived to hinder forest management efforts.
- [Tribal Forest Protection Act](#) Agreements
 - Chief Schultz and Committee Chairman [Bruce Westerman \(R-AR\)](#) highlighted the use of Tribal Forest Protection Act agreements as part of the Trump Administration's executive order to enhance timber production and forest management.
 - These agreements are designed to empower Tribal governments to collaborate on forest health initiatives and wildfire mitigation strategies.
- State, Private, and Tribal Forestry Program
 - Representatives [Teresa Leger Fernandez \(D-NM\)](#) and [Melanie Stansbury \(D-NM\)](#) raised concerns about the proposed elimination of funding for the State, Private, and Tribal Forestry Program in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.
 - They emphasized the critical role of Tribal collaboration in managing forest lands and responding to wildfires.
 - Leger Fernandez specifically noted that Tribal communities in New Mexico have been harmed by escaped prescribed burns and require improved communication and staffing from the Forest Service.
- Trust & Communication with Tribal Communities
 - Rep. Leger Fernandez stressed the urgent need to rebuild trust between the Forest Service and Tribal communities, particularly in the aftermath of damaging fires.
 - She underscored that Tribal communities have stewarded these lands for centuries and called on federal agencies to engage with them respectfully and meaningfully.