

House Natural Resources Committee

Federal Lands on Federal Forests and 2026 Wildfire Outlook

June 4, 2026

Highlights:

The hearing focused on rising wildfire risk and debated expanding forest management versus increasing funding and protections, alongside proposed changes like Forest Service reorganization and wildfire response consolidation. Members also highlighted the need for Tribal consultation and protection of sacred sites, while emphasizing growing Tribal partnerships in forest management and wildfire response.

Key Points:

- Forest Service Relationship with Tribes
 - Ranking Member Huffman highlighted that national forests have “deep and complicated” relationships with Indigenous communities, emphasizing the importance of respecting sacred sites, cultural resources, and incorporating Tribal priorities such as cultural burning and co-management into forest stewardship.
 - Some Members raised concerns about potential cuts or changes to state, private, and Tribal forestry programs, arguing these programs are critical for wildfire preparedness and land management partnerships.
 - Forest Service leadership responded that these programs remain largely funded under current House proposals, though they acknowledged ongoing debates about federal versus state responsibilities
- Partnerships with States and Tribes for Forest Management
 - The Forest Service reported entering into shared stewardship agreements, including agreements with three Tribal nations, and emphasized that Tribes are increasingly involved in co-management, restoration work, and even direct management of certain federal lands such as wilderness areas.
 - Leadership noted that Tribes bring local knowledge, workforce capacity, and long-term stewardship experience, and in some cases have been strong advocates for more active forest management.
 - Additionally, there was discussion of broader collaboration models—such as Good Neighbor Authority and shared stewardship agreements—that include Tribes alongside states and local governments to increase capacity for fuels reduction and restoration.
- Land Use and Resource Development

- One Member strongly warned against proposed mining activities on national forest lands in New Mexico that are culturally significant to Tribal and traditional communities, urging meaningful consultation and protection of sacred sites before advancing such projects.
- Overall, while Tribal issues were not the central focus of the hearing, they were consistently framed around three themes: the need to respect cultural landscapes and consultation, the importance of maintaining and funding Tribal forestry programs, and the growing role of Tribes as key partners—and in some cases co-managers—in federal forest and wildfire policy.
- Reorganization and Staffing
 - Multiple members highlighted workforce reductions of roughly 25% or more since 2025, arguing this has already reduced hazardous fuels work and overall agency capacity. In response, the Forest Service framed changes as a “back-to-basics” restructuring, including relocating headquarters, consolidating research programs, and shifting toward a state-based leadership model intended to move decision-making closer to the field.
- Fix Our Forests Act
 - A major policy focus was active forest management vs. regulatory barriers. Republican members repeatedly argued that overgrown forests and limited timber harvesting are the primary drivers of catastrophic wildfire, citing declining harvest levels and litigation delays.
 - They pushed for passage of the Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA) to streamline NEPA, reduce lawsuits, expand categorical exclusions, and increase timber production. In contrast, Democratic members cautioned that workforce cuts, reduced research funding, and weakening environmental protections could worsen forest health outcomes.