

I have been married for 37 years to the same woman, and I have three daughters. I want good women's health care. Let's fund it, but let's give it directly to the facilities that will do the mammograms and not send it to Planned Parenthood for them to take their cut.

When you pay for the rent and the utilities and you know there is criminal activity going on, you are an accessory. Congress should not be an accessory.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. McCLINTOCK). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOONEY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to voice my deepest concerns for the health and safety of the women, children, all babies, and families in our great country.

Recent undercover videos by The Center for Medical Progress unearthed some of the most alarming information that has been hidden from the American people for years. These videos deeply disturb me, and I know I am not alone.

The practices uncovered in the Planned Parenthood videos are repulsive. I never dreamed I would be standing before this body questioning if our own government is a willing enabler in the profiteering from the buying and selling of aborted baby parts.

It is wrong that Planned Parenthood continues to do as it pleases and that the American taxpayers are bankrolling that organization. We are spending \$450 million a year funding Planned Parenthood.

That is why I sent a letter along with 134 of my colleagues in the House of Representatives on July 27 that calls for a full investigation into Planned Parenthood by the Justice Department.

Mr. Speaker, I speak for the people that I am blessed to represent from the Second Congressional District in West Virginia. I am here to say that taxpayers should not fund abortions. Supporters of Planned Parenthood continually point to other services that they provide.

There is precisely one Planned Parenthood provider in all of West Virginia, located in Vienna, less than an hour outside of my district, right here. One. Does it even provide mammograms? No, it does not.

□ 1800

However, we have more than 300 federally certified women's care facilities in West Virginia that do provide these essential services. Taxpayers should not be forced to fund abortions through Planned Parenthood. We should defund that organization from taxpayer funding dollars right now.

Senior officials—on camera—were caught admitting to unethical, illegal activities in the selling of body parts.

Let's define what we are talking about here. This is a baby approximately 16 weeks after the moment of conception. Human life begins at conception. This is a baby.

Some would like to define it as something else—call it anything but a baby. They will call it a fetus, a blob of tissue, cells; but they do not want to call this little boy or girl a baby. However, you couldn't sell baby body parts, such as lungs, hearts, livers, as Planned Parenthood was caught doing, unless it was a baby.

This is a baby. This is what he or she looks like. This is what taxpayers in this country—you, the taxpayers—are being forced to pay for, the killing of this baby and the buying or selling of her body parts. That is wrong. That is what we are standing against here in the U.S. House of Representatives, and we need your support in this.

The Federal Government needs to stop enabling this black market business immediately. That is why I have cosponsored several pieces of legislation to make sure that the taxpayers and thousands of unborn children are protected from the activities and horrendous actions of Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers.

H.R. 3134, the Defund Planned Parenthood Act of 2015, simply prohibits funding of Planned Parenthood for a year to allow for a full congressional investigation to take place.

H.R. 3197, the Protecting Life and Taxpayers Act of 2015—this bill will prohibit Federal funding of an entity that performs abortions, including Planned Parenthood.

H.R. 3215, the End Trafficking of the Terminated Unborn Act of 2015—this bill will prohibit any transfer of fetal tissue from aborted babies for a purpose other than disposal. This will prevent both publicly and privately funded research involving the remains of unborn children who were aborted.

Finally, my bill, H.R. 816, the Life At Conception Act, would define life at the moment of conception, which is a biological fact.

The abortion issue, actually, in this bill defunding Planned Parenthood—which our goal is to defund Planned Parenthood—does not actually stop abortion. I wish we could. Abortion is the taking of a human life.

Defund Planned Parenthood is simply saying that taxpayers should not be forced to pay for those abortions. That is a widely accepted view of the majority of Americans, even those who may disagree with us pro-life advocates on the abortion issue. Many people think that abortion shouldn't be funded with taxpayer dollars.

All of these bills are crucial to making sure that the American taxpayer is no longer footing the bill or condoning the barbaric practices of Planned Parenthood or any other organization like them that traffics in aborted baby body parts.

I hope my colleagues will join me in voting for these four vital pieces of leg-

islation and remove taxpayer funding of abortion in the spending bills before us in Congress. That is our duty in the U.S. House of Representatives.

We control spending in this Chamber. No one can tell us what to do. We represent the people in the districts that voted us into office. I am calling on the folks in this Chamber and in America to support the defunding of Planned Parenthood now.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

WILDFIRES AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) is recognized for the remainder of the hour as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on the topic of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw attention to wildfires and forest management.

Recent headlines show that our forests are in terrible shape: 8.8 million acres have burned this year; \$250 million was recently transferred from forest management accounts to fight fires, announced last week.

Emergency fire spending has already topped \$700 million this year and is still growing. We have a problem that is greatly decreasing and impairing the value of our forest for the next generation.

I worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to pass H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act, back in July. This bill was supported from Maine to Alaska by Democrats and Republicans. The bill ends the destructive practice of fire borrowing in a fiscally responsible manner. It creates a sub-account under the Stafford Act for wildfire. This ensures that resources to put out major fires are available when necessary.

This week, the Obama administration publicly called on the Congress to fix fire borrowing. While I appreciate the President's interest, I agree with him that we need to fix fire borrowing. I applaud the 19 Democrats who voted for H.R. 2647 that fixes fire borrowing.

Fixing fire borrowing alone won't solve the problem. Fixing fire borrowing alone simply is treating a symptom instead of a disease. It is like putting on a bandaid without cleaning out the wound.

Again, the House passed this bipartisan legislation back in July. We could be fixing these problems now, but

the Senate hasn't acted. It is time for the Senate to act. It is time to stop playing politics with our Nation's forests, one of our most treasured resources. The House offered a solution. Let's embrace constructive governance and make H.R. 2647 the law of the land.

I want to take a moment and look at what the Resilient Federal Forests Act does. We already talked about fire borrowing, but it also prevents future fires.

H.R. 2647 gives the Forest Service the tools it needs to better manage our national forests immediately after its passage. Our forests are overgrown, and therefore, they are fire prone. Fighting fires doesn't prevent future fires. That is why we need better management. Scientific thinning helps prevent future fires.

I would like to show some photographs from a forest in my home State of Arkansas. To some, this may look like a healthy, thriving forest because you see trees and you see a lot of greenery, but I am a forester, and when I look at that, I see an overstock stand of trees. I see too much undergrowth. I see too much dead and dying material on the forest floor. This is not a healthy forest, but this happens to be a control site in the middle of a healthy forest.

Next, I want to show how we get to a healthy forest on this particular side.

This area has been thinned, and there is controlled burns taking place. These burns take place on intervals of 3 to 5 years. They not only make the forest better to withstand potential forest fires; they also create better wildlife habitat. The biodiversity in this forest goes through the roof when these kind of management practices are put in place. We get healthy trees. We get an early successional habitat that is good for wildlife. It also is good for the soil; it is good for water quality, and it is good for air quality.

This last picture shows what a healthy forest in my district looks like. These trees are thriving. This is an early growth not too long after a fire. This is a great wildlife habitat. The biodiversity of wildlife and plant life is much higher in this photograph than what we saw in the previous photograph. This creates a win-win situation.

Now, this isn't the solution for everywhere across the country; this is what works in the forests in my district, but there are forest managers across this country that know how to manage their forests in their particular climate and in their particular setting to create healthy forests and forests that can withstand a fire. It would be almost impossible for a forest fire to destroy these trees.

The next thing that the Resilient Federal Forests Act does is it stops frivolous lawsuits. You may ask: Why do we need to stop frivolous lawsuits?

Well, frivolous lawsuits hinder forest plans that are developed locally, using science, best management practices,

and collaborative efforts that represent stakeholder values. The end result is a forest that is decreased and impaired in value for our next generation.

This bill discourages frivolous lawsuits by requiring those suing to stop collaborative projects to post a bond. If the plaintiff loses, they pay the taxpayer's legal bills. If they win, they get their money back.

This bill also aids in better land management planning. In the words of former U.S. Forest Service chief Dale Bosworth: "We do not have a fire problem on our Nation's forests; we have a land management problem. And it needs to be addressed quickly."

Delayed decisionmaking or, even worse, no decisionmaking at all, is hurting our forests. Forests are dynamic. They are a living, growing organism. When we say no action, we are actually taking action. Since forests are not static, scientific analysis should not be static.

This bill requires the Forest Service to critically analyze the impacts of no action, which often are overgrowth, increased wildfire, and diseases. Increases in future wildfire problems are often caused because of poor land management. It makes it difficult for reforestation, ultimately decreasing and impairing the value of forests.

This bill sets up requirements for salvage plans in response to catastrophic events. It requires environmental assessments for salvage projects to be completed within 90 days so that timber can be removed while it is still commercially valuable.

The USDA completed post-Hurricane Katrina NEPA on the De Soto National Forest within 90 days. They expedited it. They were successful at that. As a result, 80 percent of the timber was salvaged that was in moderate to heavily damaged areas.

The management actions laid out in this bill must comply with forest plans. It is not taking a shortcut. Despite what some folks say, this doesn't mean thousands of acres clearcut. It doesn't mean destruction of snag habitats that often become available after a large fire.

In my home State, clearcuts are restricted to 180 acres, at most. We are talking about thousands of acres of land that still have to follow forest management practices.

This bill rewards collaboration. It incentivizes collaboration and speeds up the implementation of collaborative projects. It safeguards a strong, timely environmental review process through categorical exclusions for forest management projects.

You may ask: What are collaborative projects? This is simply where local land managers, environmentalists, citizens, and industry representatives come up with a plan. These groups spend hundreds if not thousands of hours working on a plan that is best for their local area. Why wouldn't we encourage this sort of compromise?

This bill encourages more collaborative projects. Passing this bill shows

that we endorse commonsense plans that tend to local and ecological needs.

This bill creates greater reforestation after natural disasters. As a forester, this statistic is really disturbing to me. On average, less than 3 percent of an area is reforested after a catastrophic event on our national forests. This bill requires that 75 percent reforestation takes place within 5 years. This will revitalize our forests that are destroyed by fire or other natural events.

When we reforest an area, we have young trees that grow fast and sequester carbon faster than older, fully grown trees. If we want to sequester more carbon, then we should be planting more trees. We should demand that we reforest our land after the timber is destroyed in one of these catastrophic events.

We have to stop playing politics, and we need to pass this bill.

This bill creates greater roles for the tribes. Oftentimes, the Federal Government does not collaborate and work together with those who have expertise in forest health. This bill brings in State and tribal governments as strong partners in forest management.

It gives the Forest Service the authority to accept assistance from States willing to put money toward forest management.

□ 1815

It also reinforces existing tribal authority to assist in the management of national forest land adjacent to reservations.

The Resilient Federal Forests Act modernizes secure rural schools. This is an issue that is very important in my district. We have many rural areas near our national forests, and the schools are hurting because of the decreased funding because we are not keeping our forests healthy.

Rural communities not only depend on our forests for their sustenance, but they also provide emergency services, education, and support for the forests and residents who live near the forests. As forests lose value, communities suffer, and they will only suffer more in the future.

This bill gives counties flexibility to spend secure rural schools funding. It allows them to spend money on emergency services on Federal lands, and it puts 25 percent of stewardship contracts into the county treasury where the projects occurred.

This bill means more money for our schools and other public services, along with the benefits of a healthy and resilient forest.

One more time, I want to look at the fire borrowing issue. This is one of the worst fire seasons we have seen. We know what good management practices are. We know how to implement those practices on the land.

The House has acted by passing H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act. It solves fire borrowing. It completely reforms current bad management practices. And this is isn't just me saying

this. We have letters from hundreds of groups that have endorsed this bill. Here is a list of just a few of them: the Forest Products Industry National Labor Management Committee, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the National Association of Counties, the National Association of Forest Service Retirees, the National Water Resources Association, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. There are hundreds more that have supported this legislation because it is good, commonsense legislation that is good for our country; it is good for our forests.

The House has acted. It is time for the Senate to act. It is time for the administration to stop playing politics with wildfire. It is time to make H.R. 2647 the law of the land.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New Mexico (Mr. PEARCE).

Mr. PEARCE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding and for bringing this subject up. It is a subject that all of us in the West deal with every year.

A couple of years ago, we had Tom Tidwell in New Mexico. He was there at a time when the Forest Service was in the process of burning down 255 homes in Ruidoso. The fire almost burned completely out of control and burned the entire town down. That is what the agency was surprised and frightened by.

These fires are caused by a lack of management. And instead of addressing the problem by reducing the number of trees in the forests, the Forest Service is saying, and Tom Tidwell himself said, that our policy is going to be to reintroduce fire into its natural habitat.

Introducing fire into the forest at this stage, with the years of no attention, with the years of fuel buildup, with the decades of drought that have put them in an explosive position in much of the West, is absolute lunacy. And yet this was the highest ranking Forest Service employee saying that we need to reintroduce fire into the wild.

I am sorry, but we need to clean up the forest first, then the fire can keep the forest healthy—but not until then. These raging wildfires are a natural conclusion to the management policies for the past decades, and so we can't start and act like that policy has not been in place.

Another policy that the Forest Service is engaged in is letting fire achieve management objectives. If I were to take a look at, say, one of the large fires out in Grant County, in the Gila Wilderness area of New Mexico, you can see the daily reports where they are talking about, well, the fire is 300 acres, it is 600 acres, and it is achieving its management objective.

Well, there is one truth about New Mexico: If the wind is not blowing today, it is going to blow tomorrow. Letting those fires go, while they are

supposedly monitoring them, and the fire then gets the push from the wind and grows from 300 or 800 acres to 10,000 to 30,000 acres is, again, a natural conclusion to the management policies of this Forest Service.

It is time for us to revise the way our forests are managed. Mr. WESTERMAN has a bill that is exactly right, H.R. 2647, and we should pass that bill, and that process should go forward.

Let's start cleaning the excess timber out of our forests. It is much simpler than what everybody wants to make it. It is much simpler than the Forest Service would allow.

So again, I appreciate the fact that you are bringing this issue up. I appreciate the fact that you have yielded time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I thank the gentleman from New Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I wish to express thanks to the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) for leading this discussion tonight. It is very important to many of us in rural America.

Of course, my district, which includes seven national forests, has experienced increasingly devastating forest fires caused by overgrown, mismanaged, or even nonmanaged forests, and has been economically strangled by restrictions on forest management.

Our Nation has already lost over 8½ million acres to wildfire, and the year isn't yet over. We are on pace to exceed the record of 10 million acres burned back in 2006, and that is not a record we want to break.

Our rural communities, public lands, and the environment are being destroyed through neglect. The habitat is gone, erosion into our lakes and waterways goes unchecked, and the people's asset, the value of the trees, is wasted.

In light of Forest Service surveys finding that over 12 million Sierra Nevada trees have died in the last year, we cannot afford to wait another year.

That is why we need Mr. WESTERMAN's bill, H.R. 2647, which will return active management to our forests by increasing flexibility, cutting red tape, and, most importantly, acting to manage forests before fires occur, not afterwards.

Streamlining review process means that forest management can occur when it is actually needed to address dangerous conditions, not after years of legal roadblocks.

Allowing categorical exclusions for post-fire salvage and rehabilitation hastens forest recovery and prevents fuel buildup that can contribute to future fires.

Expanding local involvement in forest management will improve the data and know-how available for planning and also respect local priorities.

Finally, the budget impact of forest neglect can no longer be ignored. Just this week, the Forest Service diverted yet another \$250 million from forest

management to fighting fire. That brings the Federal spending total so far this year on firefighting to \$700 million, money that, though we agree, needs to fight fire this year, could surely be used better if we properly managed forests in the future.

This bill will end the borrowing by funding fires, as we do hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters, making them eligible for FEMA disaster funds.

In California, over 1,000 homes have burned. Tens of thousands have been evacuated from their homes or communities. Firefighters have lost their lives, as well as some residents now. This is a needless loss of life, needless suffering in rural America.

Let's start by keeping H.R. 2647 moving in the process through the Senate and on to the President's desk.

I again thank Mr. WESTERMAN for his leadership and allowing me to speak on this important topic here tonight.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I thank the gentleman from California.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Montana (Mr. ZINKE).

Mr. ZINKE. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support to remind my colleagues in the Senate that the Western United States is on fire. We don't have time for inaction and more political pandering.

The House has passed the Resilient Federal Forests Act, which includes vital reforms that can be implemented tomorrow if our colleagues in the Senate take the bill up.

So why don't we do what is right for America? Why don't we come together and move the bill?

This wildfire season has been one of the worst in the last 10 years, and it has had enormous cost. Despite the cooler conditions in Montana, we have 35 fires that are continuing to burn, a total of 334,000 acres gone. That is equivalent to 522 miles, square miles. Two-thirds of this acreage belongs to the public, our national forests.

And it is not just the physical damage. We lost four firefighters in Washington, four that paid the sacrifice fighting forest fires, and we have to remember that.

I was at a fire in Glacier National Park. It was a reburn from a fire that occurred in 2003. The reburn happened to occur because of a threat of a lawsuit which prevented the Forest Service from doing the right thing. What they wanted to do was salvage timber. But because there was standing timber, ground crews couldn't get at it. And when ground crews couldn't get it, that means they had to fly aircraft at \$3,000 an hour to put out the fire. That is wrong. It is wrong for Montana, and it is wrong for America.

I know the firsthand value of our natural resources. I am a conservationist. But I also know the value of tourism in Montana. I also know the value of clean air. And when the smoke in Montana—which people travel all the way from across this country and

the world to go to—is worse than Beijing, it has an impact.

It also has an impact on the elderly, the asthmatic. It is unhealthy. Worst of all, it is preventable.

The problem is real. Not only does the Forest Service lack the resources to adequately fight fires, it has a land management problem at the source.

Former Chief of the Forest Service, Dale Bosworth, his quote before the hearing was: “We do not have a fire problem . . . we have a land management problem.”

This isn't from a political member. This is from a scientist. And yes, we need more scientists in the woods and less lawyers.

That is why I am proud of what we did in the House on H.R. 2647. We passed it back in July because we saw this problem coming, and so we crafted a solution. That is what we are all sent here to do. We were sent here for solutions, to look at the challenges ahead and make a difference.

So this bill addresses both the fire borrowing problem and the practices that have created the crisis that we now, unfortunately, have to bear. It does address lawsuits that are frivolous. The number one expense in the Forest Service is fighting forest fires, Number two is litigation, and if they have any money left, then that is what they use for management.

Why are we spending, this fire season, over \$600 million in August alone? Don't we all agree that \$600 million can be better utilized by preventing forest fires, by restoring habitat, by providing better public access, better recreational activities and opportunities on our public lands?

Unfortunately, we have lost this fire season, and still it burns.

Unfortunately, the Senate won't take up the bill. My fellow Montanan Senator STEVE DAINES has been a loud and vocal advocate of this bill. He understands, and I am asking his colleagues to stand and do the right thing: Take the bill up. If you don't like a provision in the bill, then show leadership and put an amendment on it and we will work together to fix it. That is what leadership does. But to sit there and not take up the bill and have no action is unacceptable.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I thank the gentleman from Montana.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to add that when we passed this bill in the House, we put amendments on it that were offered by Democrats. We were open. We listened. We wanted to do what is best for the forest.

I encourage the Senate to take up this bill. If there is something you don't like, let's talk about it. But let's do what is best for the forest. Let's make this bill the law of the land.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Wyoming (Mrs. LUMMIS).

□ 1830

Mrs. LUMMIS. I join in thanking Representative WESTERMAN for this

legislation and this Special Order tonight, explaining the extent to which these catastrophic wildfires are destroying the West and other areas of our country.

This year, over 9 million acres have burned in the West. It is a new record for catastrophic wildfires. This year, most of the damage has been in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and northern California.

You heard the gentleman from northern California earlier talk about the number of houses that have been destroyed; the lives that have been disrupted; the wildlife that has been destroyed; the habitat that has been destroyed; the carbon that has gone up in the air and the illness that that has caused; the watersheds that are destroyed; the oxygen that is destroyed when you have ash running down hill-sides into streams, choking the oxygen out of the water, killing the fish.

The habitat destruction, the effects on people and ungulates and fish and resources, it is irresponsible. We have a stewardship obligation for these lands. We know how to manage these lands. This doesn't need to be happening.

Representative WESTERMAN is a professional forester and an engineer. He has spent his career studying the science of doing this right.

I have a photograph here of an example of how to do this right. He showed us some earlier from his State of Arkansas. I want to show you how his methodology works in the Black Hills that straddle the border between South Dakota and Wyoming.

You can't see this terribly clearly, but if you look at this vibrant green in the middle and compare it to the browns and yellows that you see down here—Black Hills National Forest—that has been thinned, that has been forested, that has been conservation logged.

It has created sunlight in places that were clogged and choked from sunlight. It has created healthy underbrush, as opposed to a clogged underbrush that burns. It has allowed wildlife to graze. It allows snow to be stored and held longer in the forest into the spring and very early summer before it melts and goes downstream, thereby preventing flooding downstream. It is a natural hedge against flooding.

We know all of this. All we have to do is pass and implement Representative WESTERMAN's bill, and we can start preventing this.

The day to save a tree is yesterday, but this summer, because we have ignored this problem for so long, we let 9 million more acres go up in smoke in the West.

I spent the entire August work period in my State of Wyoming. Although Wyoming, thank God, wasn't on fire this summer—it has been in the past—but I can tell you, every day, when I woke up on the western side of the State of Wyoming, my eyes were burning from fires that were burning hundreds of miles west of me in Idaho, in Oregon,

in Washington, and in northern California.

To ignore science, to ignore management practices, and to allow this to continue is abominable.

The gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) has the answer. The House passed it. I urge the Senate to take it up.

I thank the gentleman from Arkansas for his thoughtful contribution to the Congress of the United States by serving here.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I thank the gentlewoman from Wyoming for her comments, and I also thank her for pointing out that forest management is different in different parts of the country.

We have trained forestry professionals all over this country. We have good people working for the Forest Service that know how to do the right job, but their hands are tied. They can't use the things that they have learned in forestry school. They can't use the things that they have learned through practice. They can't practice the art of forestry and the science of forestry because of policy here in Washington, D.C.

We need to untie their hands so that they can implement these management procedures on the land to make it healthier.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. McCLINTOCK).

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking Congressman WESTERMAN for organizing this Special Order tonight and for his indispensable work on the Natural Resources Committee and its Subcommittee on Federal Lands.

Mr. WESTERMAN is a professional forester, schooled at Yale University, which the founder of the U.S. Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, did so much to shape.

Mr. WESTERMAN's H.R. 2647 represents the first step toward restoring the sound, well-established, scientifically validated, and time-tested methods that, for generations, produced healthy, thriving, and vibrant forests.

These forest management practices prevented vegetation and wildlife from overgrowing the ability of the land to support them. Not only did this assure robust and healthy forests capable of resisting fire, disease, and pestilence, but it also supported the prosperous economy.

Revenues from the sale of excess timber provided a steady stream of revenues to the Treasury which could, in turn, be used to further improve the public lands.

About 45 years ago, we replaced these sound management practices with what can only be described as a policy of benign neglect. In 1970, Congress adopted the National Environmental Policy Act that opened a floodgate of ponderous and Byzantine laws, regulations, and lawsuits, with the explicit promise that they would “save the environment.”

Well, after 45 years of these policies, I think we are entitled to ask: How is the environment doing?

Well, according to every scrap of evidence submitted to our subcommittee by a broad cross-section of experts, the answer is that these laws have not only failed to improve the forest environment; they have catastrophically harmed that environment.

Surplus timber harvested from our national forests as a result of these laws has dropped dramatically since the 1980s, while acreage destroyed by forest fire has increased concurrently and concomitantly. Wildlife habitats that were supposed to be preserved are now being incinerated.

Precipitation that once flowed to riparian habitats now evaporates in overgrown canopies or is quickly claimed in the fierce competition of densely packed vegetation. We have lost vast tracts of our national forests to beetle infestations, as weakened trees can no longer resist their attacks.

The U.S. Forest Service reports that in the Tahoe Basin in my district, there is now four times the vegetation density as normal, and trees that once had room to grow and thrive now fight for their lives against other trees trying to occupy the same ground.

Revenues that our forest management agencies once produced and that facilitated our forest stewardship have all but dried up. This has devastated mountain communities that once thrived from the forest economy, while precious resources are diverted for lifeline programs like secure rural schools and PILT.

Despite a growing population, visitation to our national forests has declined significantly. We can no longer manage lands to prevent fire or even salvage dead timber once fire has destroyed it.

Appeals, lawsuits, and especially the threat of lawsuits have paralyzed and demoralized the Forest Service and created perverse incentives to do nothing to manage our lands.

The steadily deteriorating situation is forcing managers to raid forest treatment and fire prevention funds to pay for the growing costs of wildfire suppression, creating a fiscal death spiral—the more we raid prevention funds, the more wildfires we have; the more wildfires we have, the more we have to raid our prevention funds.

Ironically, our private forest lands are today conspicuously healthier than the public lands, precisely because the private lands are free from so many of the laws that are tying the hands of our public foresters. These laws may be making environmental law firms rich, but they are killing our national forests.

H.R. 2647 is the first step toward restoring sound, rational, and scientific management of our national forests. It streamlines fire and disease prevention programs and assures that fire-killed timber can be quickly removed to create both the revenues and the room to restore fire-damaged lands. It protects forest managers from frivolous lawsuits.

In my district, comprising the Sierra Nevada mountains in California, two major forest fires are now raging. The Butte fire in Amador County has already killed two people, left hundreds homeless, and destroyed 72,000 acres of forest land. The Rough fire in Fresno County has destroyed 141,000 acres, and they are still burning tonight.

We have exhausted our firefighting budget, and, without relief, we will have to begin stripping funds intended for fire prevention.

Mr. WESTERMAN's bill would allow these catastrophic wildfires to be funded like every other natural disaster.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very simple choice. We can continue the misguided environmental laws that, for 45 years, have become responsible for the destruction of hundreds of square miles of our national forests every year, or we can restore the sound forest management practices that will guarantee healthy and resilient forests for the next generation.

This bill has already passed the House. It is now sitting in the Senate, and it is essential that the Senate act soon to put it on the President's desk.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I thank the gentleman from California and would also like to thank the gentleman for his tireless efforts on the Natural Resources Committee, the chairman of the Federal Lands Subcommittee.

This is something that—I am a freshman, and I have been working on for a small amount of time—but he has spent years working on this issue. I thank him for his tireless efforts and his desire to see healthy forests not only in his home State but across the country.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. PALMER).

Mr. PALMER. Mr. Speaker, sometimes overlooked in the debate surrounding wildfires is the importance of forestry practices intended to prevent the wildfires before they start.

The Resilient Federal Forests Act, authored by my friend from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN), passed the House in July with bipartisan support. Since then, there have been multiple fires, major fires that are raging across the country.

This bill would simplify and streamline environmental process requirements and reduce the cost of forest management projects intended to prevent catastrophic wildfires. The bill would also allow for quick removal of dead trees to pay for reforestation after large fires and prevent the incidence of reburn.

As wildfires continue to burn in the Western United States, with tremendous costs to people and property, it is important to note that these fires are literally sending billions of dollars of Federal assets up in smoke, depriving State government, local government, and the Federal Government of billions in revenues not just in wood products, but in recreation revenues.

I am a small forest owner myself. I understand the value of a healthy well-managed forest.

Mr. Speaker, America has already lost 9 million acres in valuable forests this year. Our forests continue to burn and more will be burned unless we act on this legislation. I encourage my colleagues in the Senate to quickly pass this much-needed legislation and send it to the President's desk.

Mr. WESTERMAN. I thank the gentleman from Alabama. We are from Southern States, but good forestry management is very important to us as well. I have about 2.5 million acres of Federal forest in my district in Arkansas, and we want to see that land managed properly. We don't want to see it go up in smoke.

Mr. Speaker, we face a lot of contentious issues in this body and in Congress, but this shouldn't be one of them.

President Roosevelt, who was the father of our national forests, along with Gifford Pinchot, said that this is one of our most treasured natural resources. We need to leave it in better shape for the next generation than what we received it in.

Right now, we are not doing that. This is not a partisan issue. This is something that we need to look at the science, we need to work together, and we need to do what is right for America. We need to do what is right for forests because healthy forests create a winning situation on many levels.

We get better air quality. We get better water quality. We get a better economy. We get better wildlife habitat. We sequester more carbon.

□ 1845

There is not a downside to a healthy forest, but we have to get our act right here in Washington, D.C.

It is with that that I, again, plead with and encourage the Senate to take up this issue. Let's have a debate on it. Let's fix this and get ourselves back on the right path to healthy forests. We didn't get here overnight, and we are not going to fix everything overnight, but we have to start sometime. The sooner we start, the sooner we can have our forests back in a healthy condition and the sooner we can enjoy this national treasure that belongs to all of us in America.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

VOTE "NO" TO DEFUNDING PLANNED PARENTHOOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2015, the gentlewoman from Massachusetts (Ms. CLARK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. CLARK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Massachusetts?