

There was no objection.

FIRE FACTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2019, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) until 10 p.m. as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, fires are ravaging the West. I want to talk a little bit about what is going on with the fires, and I want to talk about what is not going on here in Congress.

To start with, I just want to take a quick look at the science of fire.

This fire triangle shows that three things are required to have a fire. You have to have fuel, heat, and oxygen.

There is a lot of talk about the role climate change is playing in these fires. Climate increasing temperatures can draw fuel. If it gets windy, you can have more oxygen. Lightning can be one of the things to ignite fires, but a lot of fires obviously are ignited by man-made ways.

When we talk about putting out fire, the first thing we do is try to get the fuel out of the way, or we use water to cool the fire and remove the oxygen. But we have to spend way too much time working on extinguishing fires when we can take the actions to reduce the fuel to reduce the fires.

Any time I talk about forest management, I get accused of wanting to clear-cut the national forests, and I can promise you the last thing I want to do is clear-cut the national forests. I want to use good management on the national forests. That is what we should be doing. But I often wonder if those people who talk about clear-cutting even have any idea of what a clear-cut is.

I have put this chart together that shows a comparison between a clear-cut and a catastrophic wildfire, and I will go on the record and say that catastrophic wildfires are worse than clear-cuts.

Look at the data.

During a clear-cut, the trees are killed. During a catastrophic wildfire, the trees are killed.

During a clear-cut, the trees are removed. During a catastrophic wildfire, you are left with dead snags that can be fuel for additional wildfires. All vegetation is killed. That is what happens in a catastrophic wildfire. At least in a clear-cut you leave the residual grasses and the shrubs.

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Stream zones are protected when a clear-cut is done. You leave vegetation

around the stream. Catastrophic wildfires burn to the edge of the water.

Soil and organic materials are all burned up in a catastrophic wildfire. Special care is taken to protect the soil in a clear-cut.

When a clear-cut is planned, a plan for reforestation is also in place. Often on catastrophic wildfire, there is no reforestation.

As far as planting goes, it is extensive with a clear-cut. It is unplanned and uncontrolled in a catastrophic wildfire.

The size of a clear-cut, in California, it is less than 20 acres. Wildfires are huge, burning millions of acres. We have almost burned 8 million acres to date in the wildfire season this year in the U.S.

We can continue going down the list, but you can see, even talking about carbon, at least with a clear-cut, you are putting the wood into material that stores carbon. With a wildfire, you are releasing the carbon into the air. And these dead snags eventually rot. And they are not just releasing carbon dioxide like the fire does; they are releasing methane, which is a worse greenhouse gas.

Clear-cutting is not something that we want to do in a national forest, but people who are not allowing good forest management—and that is Congress with the rules that we have—are doing something much more devastating than clear-cutting by allowing these catastrophic wildfires to continue unabated.

Just as an example, this is the Angora fire. That is a natural clear-cut. That is a stand replacing fire.

This is 12 years later, where you have no regrowth on the site.

On top of that, according to the USGS, in 2018, the carbon emissions from wildfires released the same amount of carbon as the emissions that would be produced by generating enough electricity to power California for a whole year.

Mr. Speaker, we need to take action. It is not that the Forest Service doesn't know how to manage the land, it is that we have tied their hands and we have allowed activists and lawyers to manage the forests rather than the professionals in the Forest Service.

If we don't want to see the same things repeating over and over, with loss of life, loss of property, loss of a resource that actually pulls carbon dioxide out of the air and could be used to reduce the effects of climate change, we should do something proactive and actually start managing these forests.

It is time to act, and unfortunately, Congress has sat on their hands while we continue to watch the West burn.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR).

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN), my friend, for organizing this Special Order and for his leadership and expertise on forestry issues.

The events of the last month and the last decade plus show how poorly our current forest management policies are and that they are broken and in drastic need of reform.

Nearly every corner of the West has been touched by catastrophic wildfire. My district has been home to several major fires this year, including the Bush fire that burned over 193,000 acres. 700,000 acres of land has been burned across my State.

Even before this year's fire season, the evidence of our forest management practices being broken are clear. In the last 10 years alone, wildfires have burned over 74 million acres of land in the West, and our Federal Government's reaction to this has been extremely lacking.

These catastrophic fires have devastating impacts on the environment and human health. For example, one large wildfire is roughly the equivalent of a major volcanic eruption, releasing large amounts of dangerous particles into the air. This increase of air pollution exacerbates respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19.

Because of this, earlier this year, I wrote a letter to Agriculture Secretary Perdue and Interior Secretary Bernhardt. This letter urged them to act quickly to secure contracts with private businesses to ensure that firefighters could be properly protected from COVID-19 and that the aerial support they needed to adequately fight catastrophic fires was there.

Recent studies conducted at George Mason University showed that on average, a fire stands a higher probability of being contained within 24 hours if air tankers are deployed on that fire within the first few hours. Fires that do not receive air tanker support for a period of 13 hours or more are likely to take days or weeks to achieve containment.

I also wrote a letter to Attorney General Barr that urged him to ensure that the Justice Department's Natural Resources Division was adequately resourced to fight frivolous lawsuits from radical leftwing environmental organizations.

Lawsuits from radical environmentalists are nothing new. We have seen this already in Arizona with the disastrous WildEarth Guardians lawsuit regarding the Mexican Spotted Owl. In that case, a U.S. District Court judge in Tucson issued a ruling based on bad and debunked science that stopped active forest management activities in six national forests, including the Tonto National Forest in Arizona, which was the home of the Bush fire.

This decision was a massive setback, and it is directly contributing to the enhanced fire risk that threatens our communities that we are seeing across the West.

A devastating wildfire season is not inevitable. It isn't something that we must just accept. There are steps that can be taken now to ensure that our communities are protected.

I will continue to urge the Federal agencies tasked with managing our forests and fighting catastrophic fires that bold action is necessary. Lives depend on it.

Just last year, as chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus, I had the opportunity to visit the district of my friend from California, Mr. MCCLINTOCK, where aggressive forest management practices in the Lake Tahoe Basin have prevented catastrophic fire. This active management was made possible by getting unnecessary red tape out of the way and putting what is most important first: protecting our communities from the destruction of wildfire.

Just in the last 2 years, this administration has taken steps to manage vegetation inside utility corridors, build additional firebreaks, and reform the NEPA process within the Forest Service. However, after so many years of inaction, there is a long road to hoe to where we have to get, which is why I am so pleased we are here tonight calling for serious action by this House.

There are a few pieces of legislation that have been introduced. Just to name a few: H.R. 7978, a bipartisan, comprehensive forestry reform bill led by the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA), as well as H.R. 2607, the Resilient Federal Forests Act, by Mr. WESTERMAN, both of which I am proud to support.

The Democratic leadership in this House has been transparent about the fact that they do not view forest management to prevent wildfires as a legislative priority, and that has deadly consequences.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Arkansas for holding this Special Order and for his leadership and expertise on this issue.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. GOSAR) for being here tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NEWHOUSE).

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN), my good friend, for yielding.

As we all know, the West has been on fire.

In my home State of Washington, over 700,000 acres have burned, causing thousands of families to evacuate, leaving their homes, their businesses, and their farms behind. Whole towns have essentially been wiped off the map.

Smoke blanketed central Washington, with fires raging up and down the West Coast. The air quality of our cities and our rural areas ranked the worst in the world.

As the people of central Washington and many of my colleagues in Congress understand, healthy, resilient forests are the key to wildfire prevention. We have made significant progress, but there is still much work to be done.

Without our leadership in Congress, families will continue to lose their

homes and their businesses, and jobs will continue to be lost, and our public health will continue to be threatened.

While a loss of homes and livelihoods is heartbreaking, there is nothing more tragic than the loss of life.

Today, I join the people of central Washington in mourning the loss of 1-year-old Baby Hyland, whose life was tragically cut short as his parents fled to escape the Cold Springs fire that was raging across Okanogan County. The Hyland family has suffered immeasurable loss with the deaths of both their toddler as well as the death of their unborn child. My heart aches and my prayers go out for the Hylands as they recover from their own wounds in this unimaginable heartbreak.

These tragic circumstances fall on us, Mr. Speaker. We are responsible, as the Federal Government, for failing to deliver a management strategy that enables us to prevent these catastrophic events.

We cannot continue to sit idly by.

We have to responsibly log our forests and graze our lands, or we will watch them burn.

These wildfires and this year have truly tested our resilience, but of this I am certain: in the face of catastrophe, central Washington will recover.

Now it is the Federal Government's responsibility to do everything in its power to prevent another disaster like this again.

For years, extreme environmentalist groups have insisted that we leave our forests and natural lands alone, leaving them in their quote "natural state." But as we witness, year-after-year, that strategy simply does not work.

Many point to climate change as a contributing factor; I am not here to refute that. At the end of the day though, the facts remain: our land management—or lack thereof—is a serious problem.

Decades of mismanagement, misguided environmental policies, and lackluster forestry and grazing practices have led to forests and grasslands that act as tinder for wildfires, just waiting to be set ablaze each summer.

We cannot continue to sit idly by. We have to responsibly log our forests and graze our lands, or we will watch them burn.

As I have stated all along throughout the many challenges this year has presented: Central Washington's communities are resilient.

Wildfire recovery is no easy feat, but I have seen firsthand how citizens, volunteers, local organizations, and government entities work together to revive our communities, rebuild our fallen structures, and actively work to prevent future devastation.

I have heard stories of students and volunteers jumping into action, working to clear burnt areas, making way for new structures. Fairgrounds and community groups opened to help house and treat evacuated or injured livestock and animals. Donations continue to pour in from across the state, region, and country to families and firefighters in need.

I am working closely with FEMA and USDA to ensure our communities receive the federal assistance they need, and I stand ready to help the people of our district in any way I can.

These wildfires—and this year—have tested our resilience, but of this I am certain: In the face of catastrophe, Central Washington will recover. Now it is the federal government's responsibility to do everything in its power to prevent another disaster like this again.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Washington (Mr. NEWHOUSE) for his comments tonight.

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

Mr. PALMER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) for holding this discussion about forest management.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today because "California's forests suffer from neglect and mismanagement, resulting in overcrowding that leaves them susceptible to disease, insects and wildfire." These are not my words. They are the words of the Little Hoover Commission, an independent State oversight agency in California.

In their 2018 report entitled "Fire on the Mountain," the Little Hoover Commission called for a transformational change in California forest management practices after "A century of mismanaging Sierra Nevada forests has bought an unprecedented environmental catastrophe that impacts all Californians." That is a direct quote from the report.

California's own Legislative Analyst's Office agreed and found that limitations on timber harvests and emphasis on fire suppression and an increasing number of environmental permitting requirements have led to unhealthy dense forests.

Thankfully, both groups recognize that commonsense forest management practices could not only help prevent wildfires, but also reduce carbon emissions. Properly managed and healthy forests are more resilient and sequester more carbon than overgrown forests.

Simple recommendations like shifting from fire suppression to using fire as a tool and setting up long-term forest management strategies are just a couple of the low-cost solutions that can help us achieve healthier forests.

Unlike policies such as the Green New Deal, these practices would actually help address wildfires and would not cost trillions of dollars to implement. Furthermore, these actions can all be taken today, and they fall in line with some of the things that my Republican colleagues and I have been suggesting on the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis: that if we take action to mitigate and adapt to the climate change that we know is going to occur, we could avoid some of the catastrophes that we are seeing play out in California right now and in other places in the West.

If you care about protecting our citizens from wildfires and reducing carbon emissions, then you should support responsible forest management. Instead of wasting time on unrealistic solutions, we should take serious action to prevent unnecessary wildfires and

improve the carbon sequestration potential of our forests.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. PALMER) for his comments.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON).

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) for hosting this Special Order on wildfire.

Mr. Speaker, over the past decade, there has been an average of 64,100 wildfires and 6.8 million acres burned every year.

With over 10 million acres burned, we saw the highest number of Federal acres burned in 2015—and nearly that amount in 2017.

But this year, it has been even worse. 2020 has been an extremely difficult wildfire year for our firefighters, our responders, and many rural communities in and near the forests.

As of today, October 1, over 44,000 wildfires have burned nearly 7.7 million acres this year alone.

In addition to the destruction of these forests, homes, and property, we sadly continue to see lost lives.

Over the past 25 years, active management has plummeted across the national forest system; consequently, it is no coincidence that the larger, more intense fires are happening on Federal lands, where there is less management, versus State and private lands.

More individual fires occur in the East, but the wildfires in the West are larger and burn more acres. Wildfires also have significant impacts on eastern forests because of the budgetary effects on the Forest Service's ability to manage and personnel.

We must be encouraging more active forest management across the National Forest system. This includes thinning, prescribed fires, and hazardous fuels reduction, especially in the roughly 19 million acres of Federal lands that are already known to be at high risk.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, Mr. WESTERMAN, for his great work during the last farm bill and his leadership with the Resilient Federal Forests Act and the Trillion Trees Act.

Through the next farm bill, I am hopeful that we can continue to build on those commonsense reforms, and we will provide more authorities to help the Forest Service better manage and encourage more partnerships.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for being here tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to illustrate here that this isn't difficult. It is not rocket science.

This is a control in the first picture. You see all the underbrush, the ladder fuels. This is on Federal land as well.

You see the forest management in the middle where you thin it out, you do controlled burns. You do those every few years, and you get a resilient forest that looks like this.

California and Oregon and Arizona and Washington State, Nevada, they

could have forests that look like this. Now, it would be those species that are out there, and the management would be done accordingly, but there is no reason we can't do this.

It is Speaker PELOSI's State that is on fire. It is Chairman GRIJALVA's State that is on fire. It is Chairman DEFAZIO's State that is on fire.

I wish that Democrats would take time to do what is right, to address these fires, to quit playing politics with relief bills that are going nowhere and do something that could really help the people and their States.

We want to help, but we can't do it on our own. We are in the minority.

We will work together and offer suggestions, but it is going to take a bipartisan effort to change these rules so that management can take place.

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

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor our firefighters who put their lives on the line to keep our communities safe every day. As new wildfires start every week, these brave men and women selflessly join the fight to protect life and property, while their families must live with the uncertainty of the threats they face on the frontlines. I commend these individuals, and Congress must provide all the support necessary to ensure our firefighters can return safely to their families.

I also commend the heroes joining the fight from across the country. California's firefighting resources are strained by the sheer number and size of the fires we face, and it is a testament to our nation's highest ideals that firefighters from across the West have come to our aid as these historic fires rage in every corner of our state.

Riverside County has already faced four distinct fires this wildfire season, burning over 60,000 acres in and around my district. In these fires alone, 17 individuals have been injured, and one firefighter lost his life trying to put out the El Dorado fire. Charlie Morton was a 14-year veteran of the Forest Service, and I send my deepest condolences to Charlie's family for their terrible loss.

Nearly every year California seems to break some record during the fire season.

It doesn't have to be this way.

For years, top congressional Democrats have rejected bipartisan proposals to reform our nation's forest management practices. Many Democrats have outright rejected the idea that how we manage our National Forests has anything to do with the increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires in the West.

Well, here are some of the facts:

Since 2010, approximately 150 million trees have died across federal, state, and private lands in California.

It is estimated that over 2 million properties are at extreme risk of wildfire due to high fuel loads nearby.

Between 60 and 80 million acres of national forest are at high- to very-high risk of catastrophic wildfire, but the Forest Service treats between just 1 and 2 percent of high risk acres each year.

In January, a study in Nature found that California needs to treat approximately 20 million acres to meaningfully impact wildfire risk. We treat closer to 13,000 acres annually.

Bureaucratic delays and frivolous lawsuits have halted much of this proactive work. The town of Berry Creek, received a grant to remove hazardous fuels, but it took the state nearly two years to review the project and allow it to proceed. By the time they did, it was too late, and the North Complex fire was already raging, destroying more than 50 homes in this community.

Salvage logging is another example of a win-win solution where companies still have an economic incentive to harvest the timber while helping prevent the next catastrophic wildfire. Charred trees left in the wake of wildfires are extremely flammable and hazardous fuels. Salvage operations must be conducted quickly or the economic value is lost, and extreme environmental groups frequently file lawsuits to halt these efforts.

In 2018 when I served as Chairman of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, I worked in a bipartisan fashion with Congresswoman MCCOLLUM to prioritize forest management and fuel reduction on our federal lands. We worked in good faith to achieve some meaningful reforms including a funding fix for the Forest Service and some limited regulatory reforms. Still, much more needs to be done to protect our communities.

We need to eliminate the red-tape that prevents these common-sense management efforts. We must take forest management decisions out of the courts and put the forest managers back in the driver's seat. Fortunately, House Republicans have solutions.

Congressman MCCLINTOCK's Proven Forest Management Act takes lessons learned from a pilot program in Lake Tahoe National Forest. Land managers were able to approve the first forest management project in under four months in a 16-page report, compared to an average of 4.5 years and 500 pages. We should pass this bill and expand this successful program nationwide.

Congressman WESTERMAN's Resilient Federal Forests Act is another example. This legislation has passed the House twice with overwhelming bipartisan support but was never considered by the Senate. This bill would streamline permitting for a wide array of forest management projects. When it comes to forest management, time is of the essence, and this legislation would dramatically increase our national capability to reduce the frequency and severity of catastrophic fires across the West.

I call on Speaker PELOSI to take up these bills and pass meaningful, comprehensive forestry reform. More bureaucracy is not the answer to our wildfire crisis, and we in Congress must act like there are lives at stake, because that is the reality of the threat we face.

EXPENDITURES BY THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL UNDER HOUSE RESOLUTION 6, 116TH CONGRESS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION,

Washington, DC, October 1, 2020.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker, House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MADAM SPEAKER: Pursuant to section 302(c) of House Resolution 6 (116th Congress) I hereby submit the attached statement "setting forth the aggregate amounts expended by the Office of General Counsel on outside counsel and other experts pursuant