

POST-DISASTER REFORESTATION AND RESTORATION ACT
OF 2025

SEPTEMBER 15, 2025.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the
State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. WESTERMAN, from the Committee on Natural Resources,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 528]

The Committee on Natural Resources, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 528) to require the Secretary of the Interior to carry out a program for Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Program, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION

The purpose of H.R. 528 is to require the Secretary of the Interior to carry out a program for Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Program, and for other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

There is an urgent need to restore landscapes damaged by wildfire and other natural disasters. Since 2000, the United States has lost an average of 7 million acres per year to catastrophic wildfires, more than double the annual average lost during the 1990s.¹ Worse still, many of these catastrophic wildfires burn so severely that natural regeneration of the forest becomes impossible.² If these lands are not artificially regenerated (i.e., by planting trees), they will

¹ Anne A. Riddle, “Wildfire Statistics”, Congressional Research Service, June 1, 2023, <https://www.crs.gov/Reports/IF10244?source=search&guid=b82a4d954677449b918a65ece823396f&index=0>.

² Associated Press, “Wildfires have decimated forests. Here’s why replanting trees is a challenge,” October 2, 2024, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91200307/wildfires-forests-replanting-trees-restoration-challenges>.

eventually transition from forests to shrublands.³ In 2022, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) identified a 4-million-acre federal reforestation backlog, 80 percent of which is attributable to catastrophic wildfires.⁴ Yet, over the preceding decade, USFS addressed less than 6 percent of its post-wildfire planting needs annually.⁵ Clearly, more needs to be done to tackle the reforestation backlog.⁶

In addition to wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters have also inflicted extensive damage on many of our nation's forests, resulting in enormous tree loss. In 2024, for example, Hurricane Helene ripped through the southeastern U.S., causing widespread devastation and flooding. Roughly a fifth of the region's federal forest land was severely damaged in the storm.⁷ According to USFS, the destruction from that single hurricane extended for more than 200 miles through the southern Appalachians.⁸ Many of these areas remain in desperate need of reforestation and restoration work. Similarly, in 2019, a massive derecho, or windstorm, swept through northern Wisconsin, leveling hundreds of thousands of trees.⁹ USFS officials in Wisconsin predicted that full recovery from the event could take up to 10 years.¹⁰ Finally, in 2022, Yellowstone National Park experienced historic flooding that downed trees and resulted in prolonged closures of certain areas of the park.¹¹

H.R. 528 is a bipartisan bill, led by Representatives Pettersen (D-CO-07) and Edwards (R-NC-11), that would require federal land management agencies to carry out priority reforestation projects using cooperative agreements and contracts with non-federal partners. Specifically, the legislation would require the Department of the Interior (DOI), in coordination with other federal agencies, states, tribes, and local governments, to identify lands in critical need of rehabilitation post-natural disaster. The bill allows federal land managers to support projects through grants, contracts, or cooperative agreements. A similar proposal is included in the "Fix Our Forests Act," which passed the House of Representatives earlier in the 119th Congress in a strong, bipartisan vote.¹²

COMMITTEE ACTION

H.R. 528 was introduced on January 16, 2025, by Representative Brittany Pettersen (D-CO). The bill was referred to the Committee

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. Forest Service, "National Forest System: Reforestation Strategy: Growing and Nurturing Resilient Forests," July 2022, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reforestation-strategy.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ U.S. Forest Service, "American Forests Partners with USDA Forest Service to Expand Reforestation across National Forests," December 6, 2023, <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/12/06/american-forests-partners-usda-forest-service-expand-reforestation>.

⁷ Simon Ducroquet, et al., "Where the trees once stood: See how Hurricane Helene wiped out North Carolina's forests", The Washington Post, November 9, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2024/hurricane-helene-forest-damage-north-carolina/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, "It could take 10 years for Wisconsin to recover from the violent July wind storm that wrecked northern forests", Larry Parnass, October 23, 2019, <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/special-reports/2019/10/23/wisconsin-july-2019-derecho-wind-storm-affect-economy-decade/4047898002/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Fox News, "Parts of Yellowstone could remain closed for 'substantial length' after flooding", Julia Musto, June 15, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/yellowstone-closed-substantial-length-flooding>.

¹² H.R. 471, 119th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/471>.

on Natural Resources, and within the Committee to the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. The bill was also referred to the Committee on Agriculture. On April 29, 2025, the Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing on the bill. On July 23, 2025, the Committee on Natural Resources met to consider the bill. The Subcommittee on Federal Lands was discharged from further consideration of H.R. 528 by unanimous consent. The bill was ordered favorably reported to the House of Representatives by unanimous consent.

HEARINGS

For the purposes of clause 3(c)(6) of House rule XIII, the following hearing was used to develop or consider this measure: hearing by the Subcommittee on Federal Lands held on April 29, 2025.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

Section 1 names the legislation the “Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025.”

Section 2. Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Program

Section 2 requires the Secretary of the Interior to identify lands that require reforestation and restoration due to unplanned disturbances and that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance. Section 2 then requires the Secretary to propose a list of priority projects for reforestation and restoration to be completed each fiscal year and carry out those projects through grants or cooperative agreements. Further, this Section directs the Secretary to consult or coordinate with state and local governments, tribes, institutions of higher education, and other land management agencies with adjacent land. Finally, Section 2 requires the Secretary to report, no later than two years after the bill’s enactment and annually thereafter, to Congress on all land requiring reforestation and the progress made on priority restoration projects.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Natural Resources’ oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ACT

1. *Cost of Legislation and the Congressional Budget Act.* Pursuant to clause 3(c)(2) of House rule XIII and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of House rule XIII and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has requested but not received from the Director of the Congressional Budget Office a budgetary analysis and a cost estimate of this bill.

2. *General Performance Goals and Objectives.* As required by clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII, the general performance goal or objective of this bill is to require the Secretary of the Interior to carry out

a program for Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Program, and for other purposes.

EARMARK STATEMENT

This bill does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined under clause 9(e), 9(f), and 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

UNFUNDED MANDATES REFORM ACT STATEMENT

An estimate of federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act was not made available to the Committee in time for the filing of this report. The Chair of the Committee shall cause such estimate to be printed in the Congressional Record upon its receipt by the Committee, if such estimate is not publicly available on the Congressional Budget Office website.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

Directed Rule Making. This bill does not contain any directed rule makings.

Duplication of Existing Programs. This bill does not establish or reauthorize a program of the federal government known to be duplicative of another program. Such program was not included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139 or identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance published pursuant to the Federal Program Information Act (Public Law 95–220, as amended by Public Law 98–169) as relating to other programs.

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

PREEMPTION OF STATE, LOCAL OR TRIBAL LAW

Any preemptive effect of this bill over state, local, or tribal law is intended to be consistent with the bill's purposes and text and the Supremacy Clause of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

As ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources, H.R. 528 would make no changes in existing law.

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September 5, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman, Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter confirms our mutual understanding regarding H.R. 528, the "Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025." Thank you for collaborating with the Committee on Agriculture on the matters within our jurisdiction.

The Committee on Agriculture will forego any further consideration of this bill. However, by foregoing consideration at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over any subject matter contained in this or similar legislation. The Committee on Agriculture also reserves the right to seek appointment of an appropriate number of conferees, should it become necessary, and ask that you support such a request.

We would appreciate a response to this letter confirming this understanding with respect to H.R. 528 and request a copy of our letters on this matter be published in the Congressional Record during Floor consideration.

Sincerely,

Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chairman

Cc: The Honorable Angie Craig, Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Jason Smith, Parliamentarian, U.S. House of Representatives

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September 8, 2025

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson:

I write regarding H.R. 528, the "Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025," which was ordered reported by the Committee on Natural Resources on July 23, 2025.

I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Agriculture and appreciate your willingness to forgo further consideration of the bill. I acknowledge that the Committee on Agriculture will not formally consider H.R. 528 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained therein.

I am pleased to support your request to name members of the Committee on Agriculture to any conference committee to consider such provisions. I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the *Congressional Record* during floor consideration of the bill and will include such letters in the committee report on H.R. 528. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources

cc: The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Angie Craig, Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Jared Huffman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
The Honorable Jason Smith, Parliamentarian