

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
REGARDING
H.R. 528 – “POST-DISASTER REFORESTATION AND RESTORATION ACT OF 2025”
H.R. 655 – “THE DALLES WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT ACT”

April 29, 2025

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, to discuss H.R.528 and H.R. 655.

H.R. 528, "Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025"

H.R. 528 directs the Secretary of Interior in coordination with heads of federal land management agencies and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to identify lands requiring reforestation and restoration following unplanned disturbances that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance. The bill also requires an annual list of proposed projects for reforestation and restoration, and action to carry out priority projects. In addition, H.R. 528 requires the Secretary submit an annual report that includes an accounting of lands requiring reforestation and restoration, a list of priority projects and implementation progress, an accounting of related grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements, related outreach efforts, and assessments of, and recommendations relating to seed, seedling, and implementation gaps.

USDA strongly supports addressing post-disaster reforestation and restoration needs. The USFS has identified 3.5 million acres of reforestation needs on National Forest System Lands. More than 90% of the needs are a result of unplanned disturbances, mainly wildfire. The USFS has been increasing reforestation actions on our national forests to address these identified reforestation needs in alignment with the National Forest Management Act, as amended by the Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees (REPLANT) Act.

In FY 2024, the agency reforested a total of more than 230,000 acres through planting seedlings, direct seeding, and site preparation for natural regeneration and other actions to ensure forest regeneration. This is an increase of 30% over the last two years and is the highest level of reforestation accomplishments on National Forests since 2009. Additional activities were conducted on approximately more than 500,000 acres to evaluate and prepare sites for future reforestation actions and to monitor and steward completed reforestation treatments. As required by REPLANT, the USFS develops an annual list of priority projects and carries out annual reporting, among other requirements of the legislation.

H.R. 528 includes very similar requirements to REPLANT including developing an annual list of projects and an annual report. Although H.R. 528 outlines more specific requirements around

outreach and accounting for specific contracts and agreements, it does not give the Forest Service any additional authorities for implementing reforestation. While REPLANT pertains to the Forest Service (and not other federal land management agencies), H.R. 528 pertains to the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with heads of federal land management agencies such as the Forest Service.

USDA supports the intent of this bill and would like to work with the Committee to ensure this bill does not supersede the agency's authority in the REPLANT Act or create duplicative processes and programs.

H.R. 655, "The Dalles Watershed Development Act"

H.R. 655, "The Dalles Watershed Development Act," seeks to simplify administrative requirements for the City of The Dalles, Oregon to operate its municipal reservoir. The bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey approximately 150 acres of National Forest System (NFS) Land from the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City following written request to the Secretary for conveyance of the land within one year of enactment of the bill. The bill would also require that the conveyance would be subject to valid existing rights, made without consideration, made by quitclaim deed, and subject to such additional terms and conditions as the Secretary determines to be appropriate to protect the interests of the United States. In addition, the bill would direct the exact acreage and description of the land to be conveyed to be determined by a survey satisfactory to the Secretary and would direct the city to pay all costs associated with the conveyance, including the costs of the survey.

USDA supports H.R. 655.

The City of The Dalles municipal watershed includes the Crow Creek Dam and its reservoir, a portion of which is located on NFS lands in the Mt. Hood National Forest. Due to the location of the reservoir, the city currently operates under a Forest Service special use permit for operations and maintenance activities. Conveying this land would eliminate the City's need for a special use permit and the associated work for both City and Forest Service staff. Following passage of this legislation, the conveyed land would remain primarily bordered by NFS lands which are managed as The Dalles Watershed Management Unit. Mt. Hood National Forest continues to partner closely with the City on fuels treatments to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires within the watershed.

The agency views this proposal as consistent with the City's water infrastructure upgrades and a sound course of action. The proposed acreage to be conveyed is relatively minor and serves a specific purpose to meet the City's water management goals.

Conclusion

That concludes my testimony. Again, I thank Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present USDA's views on this proposed legislation.