



May 17, 2017

Rep. Tom McClintock
Chair, House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
2312 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Colleen Hanabusa
Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
422 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Oversight Hearing on Seeking Better Management of America's Overgrown, Fire-Prone National Forests

Dear Chair McClintock and Ranking Member Hanabusa:

We appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to the impacts of fire on our country's public lands and recreation economy, and write to share the perspectives of the outdoor recreation community and outdoor recreation businesses on addressing this problem.

In particular, as the Subcommittee works to address the impacts of fire, we ask that you consider the need to address the mechanics of fire suppression funding and the growing cost of fire suppression, while also working to ensure that any related forestry provisions respect the importance of public process and planning for on-the-ground decision making and its impacts on outdoor recreation and local economies.

Fire Funding

It is essential to fix the current system of funding for wildfire suppression in order to address its continued deleterious impacts on all other non-fire programs at the land management agencies. For years, both the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have had to transfer money from other programs to fight fires. The worst result may be the cycle created by depleting funds for work to mitigate the risk of fires in order to pay for fire suppression. But recreation programs in particular are also negatively affected. Agency programs that benefit recreation often happen in the summer season, putting recreation budgets on a collision course with fire suppression costs. Every summer, many of the resources set aside for program delivery benefitting recreation get diverted to fight fires.

While the funds transferred are significant, the effect of staff transfers is perhaps even greater. During fire season, seasonal and yearly staff are often diverted to fight fires,



leaving trail, permit applications, and other projects postponed or scrapped altogether. Similarly, valuable collaboration and planning efforts can be set back a full year or more when staff time is transferred.

Finally, the impacts on recreation go beyond funding and staffing transfers, and can last for years after a fire. Many times burnt areas remain closed to recreation access because there is no funding available for crews to reopen them. All of these on-the-ground impacts of this budgeting issue, including reduced program delivery, diverted staff time, and shortchanged restoration, are costly and avoidable.

A comprehensive wildfire funding fix must 1) minimize money transfers, 2) allow access to disaster funding or other funding outside the agencies discretionary funds and most importantly, 3) address how the increasing ten-year average of wildfire funding needs cuts into the Forest Service and Department of Interior budgets, affecting programs and funding for recreation, among many other things. These principles enjoy broad, bipartisan support, and we hope that the Subcommittee will work to advance them through legislation this congress.

Planning and the Public Process

As the Subcommittee considers reforms aimed at changing forestry practices, the outdoor recreation community believes that it remains essential to maintain processes to ensure public participation in land management decisions. Although it can be cumbersome at times, we believe, for example, that maintaining the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is essential for consideration of appropriate alternatives during decision-making, and is a key avenue for public participation. Congress should avoid creating unnecessary additional categorical exclusions and focus on ways to support agency planning efforts and avenues for public participation.

In considering how to reduce barriers that obstruct more nimble land management decision-making, we ask the Subcommittee to consider ways to support the planning activities of the resource management agencies. Our organizations were disappointed by congressional disapproval of the Bureau of Land Management's Planning 2.0 planning reforms, which would have helped to speed the resource management plan development process, while creating additional avenues for public participation and better taking into account information on recreational use of public lands. Conversely, we believe it is essential that Congress continue to support Forest Planning on our National Forests by ensuring that planners have the resources they need to move expeditiously through planning processes while considering sound science and robust public engagement. The Subcommittee should continue to look for ways to support modern planning efforts, while eschewing "streamlining" efforts that may appear

expedient, but which in reality are likely to lead to long-term conflict over land management decisions.

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Finally, although perhaps outside the purview of this hearing, as it works to consider the impacts of fire on public lands, we hope the Subcommittee will continue to bear in mind the urgency of the need for action to address climate change, which is an undeniable contributor to the problem of longer fire seasons and more severe wildfires on public lands. We appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to this issue, and look forward to working with you in the development of sound policy for fire management on our public lands.

Best regards,



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Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance



Jessica Wahl
Government Affairs Manager
Outdoor Industry Association

cc: Adam Cramer, Executive Director, Outdoor Alliance
Amy Roberts, Executive Director, Outdoor Industry Association
Brady Robinson, Executive Director, Access Fund
Wade Blackwood, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Dave Wiens, Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Phil Powers, Executive Director, American Alpine Club
Lee Davis, Executive Director, the Mazamas



About our Organizations

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of eight member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, and the Mazamas and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, and backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is the national trade association for suppliers, manufacturers and retailers in the \$887 billion outdoor recreation industry, with more than 1200 members nationwide. The outdoor industry supports more than 7.6 million American jobs and makes other significant contributions toward the goal of healthy communities and healthy economies across the United States.