

September 9, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Agriculture Committee Chair
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David Scott
Agriculture Committee Chair
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Stabenow, Chair Scott, Majority Leader Schumer, and Speaker Pelosi:

We appreciate the support from the House and Senate Agriculture Committees in recognizing the need for substantial increases in wildfire resilience, including science-based active forest management and fuel treatments, across all landscapes and ownership boundaries in the areas at greatest risk for wildfire.

America's trees and forests are a strategic national resource and a major portion of our country's natural infrastructure with vast potential as solutions for climate change, public health, and economic challenges. Healthy natural and working forests on public and private lands provide a number of public benefits, including clean air and water, enhanced wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, recreational opportunities, watershed protection, timber production, and support to rural communities.

Natural occurring wildfire serves an important role for many forest ecosystems in the United States. However, catastrophic wildfire can have disastrous effects on forests and communities. Decades of effective fire suppression combined with historical management practices have limited natural occurring wildfire's ability to serve its function for many forest ecosystems, resulting in overstocked forests that are not resilient to wildfire, posing significant risk to surrounding communities. Exacerbated by climate change, insect and disease infestations, changing weather patterns, and the build-up of hazardous fuels, these forests are more susceptible to natural and human caused wildfire.

Addressing wildfire will also ensure forests are carbon sinks and sources of clean drinking water that foster rich biodiversity, while serving as economic engines to our communities and providing recreational opportunities for all Americans. Conserving healthy and working forests should include restoring forest resilience in response to drought, insects and disease on all lands, including public, private, and tribal lands.

Bold action is needed to sustain forests, protect public safety, and prevent the conversion of forests from carbon sinks to carbon emission sources. The scale of wildfires and their community impacts far outpace current efforts to prevent them and mitigate the damage they cause. The U.S. Forest Service researchers have identified the need to treat an additional 20 million acres of National Forest System lands, and an additional 30 million acres of other federal, state, tribal, and private lands to make significant progress in reducing extreme wildfire risk and building forest resilience.

It is critical that wildfire resilience is increased by ***at least*** 5 million acres each year ***in addition*** to what is now treated. The undersigned organizations recommend between ***\$50 billion to \$60 billion over the next ten years to meet the wildfire resilience goal.***

Unfortunately to date, investments in U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior wildfire resilience programs have not adequately addressed – and, thus not met the scale of the problem. By making significant investments in wildfire mitigation and forest resilience through the budget reconciliation process, Congress can help maintain our forests as carbon sinks, create green jobs nationwide, and decrease fire risk to communities. This work is vital for scaling up forest and wildfire resilience to the levels needed for a paradigm shift and includes engaging non-federal and federal partners in furthering the multiple-use approach of our public and private forests into the 21st century.

Thank you for your efforts as you highlight wildfire resilience in the reconciliation process. We look forward to continuing to work with you in supporting the resilience of all forests.

Sincerely,

American Forest Foundation

American Forests

National Association of Forest Service Retirees

National Association of State Foresters

National Wildlife Federation

Society of American Foresters

The Nature Conservancy