

March 5th, 2025

The Honorable Senator John Boozman
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Senator Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar,

On behalf of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to embedding science, technology, innovation, and experience into government and public discourse in order to build a healthy, safe, and prosperous society, **I am writing to request that you support H.R. 471, the Fix Our Forests Act, which represents a critical step towards ending the megafire crisis.** The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry has a historic opportunity this Congress to advance legislation that will strengthen wildfire resilience, safeguard our communities, and protect our natural landscapes.

On January 23rd, 2025, the House of Representatives passed the Fix Our Forests Act with strong bipartisan support. This underscores Congress's recognition of the urgent need for accelerated and improved forest management practices and getting the best possible tools in the hands of our wildland firefighters. The Fix Our Forests Act expands upon proven methods to streamline permitting for critical fuels reduction projects without undermining the intent of landmark environmental protection laws by expanding categorical exclusions from 3,000 acres to 10,000 acres. Since 2016, the 10,000-acre Tahoe Basin Categorical Exclusion has been used to streamline the permitting process for wildfire mitigation treatments in the Tahoe region which, according to former Forest Service Chief Randy Moore, helped keep South Lake Tahoe communities safe from the 2021 Caldor Fire.¹

The bill capitalizes on the opportunity to use new science and technology to help us meet our resilience goals faster, more cost effectively, and with better results. As FAS CEO Daniel Correa has previously [stated](#):

“Failing to address the root causes of devastating wildfires is a policy choice. As the crisis in Los Angeles shows, it’s a choice we can no longer afford. The Fix Our Forests Act takes important steps to confront these disasters. FAS particularly supports the creation of the Fireshed Center, which would provide first responders with science-backed decision-support tools, and serve as a nerve center to embed and deploy critical technology across the entire wildfire lifecycle of prevention, suppression, and recovery.”

FAS is proud to have championed important provisions of this bill, including the Firefighter Casualty Assistance Program (Sec. 401), Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program (Sec. 201 & 202), Biochar Innovations and Research (Sec. 301), and Reporting on the Effectiveness of Hazardous Fuels Reduction Treatments (Sec. 302). Additionally, we supported multiple additions to the bill including incentivizing the use of proactive animal grazing for fuels mitigation (Sec. 117), public-private partnerships for low earth orbit satellites, and the addition of artificial intelligence support tools to the Fireshed Center. We also supported provisions that will help us get on

¹ Forest Service Chief Randy Moore's response to Congressman McClintock, Subcommittee Oversight Hearing, June 4, 2024, Examining the President's FY 2025 Budget Request for the U.S. Forest Service | Federal Lands Subcommittee | House Committee on Natural Resources.

a sustainable mitigation track, such as the inclusion of a testbed pilot program for innovative wildfire mitigation technologies (Sec. 303), provisions to strengthen Good Neighbor Authority (Sec. 111), and increased biochar utilization.

Decades of mismanagement and accelerating climate change are driving an alarming rise in catastrophic megafires, which are characterized by their extreme intensity, uncontrollable scale, and unprecedented damage to the natural and built environment. By some measures, the number of structures destroyed by megafires has increased by 160% over the last two decades, exhausting federal, state, Tribal, and local resources. The ecological toll that megafires wreak threatens to permanently transform landscapes and remake entire ecosystems. There is also a significant climate impact from megafires – as extreme fire behavior can transform ecosystems from carbon sinks to net carbon emitters. Wildland firefighters who confront megafires on the ground have never faced greater demands, and it is imperative to provide them with the tools they need to succeed and the benefits they deserve. We must act to forestall future devastating impacts on human health, workers, communities, ecosystems, and the climate.

FAS looks forward to working with Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on this critical piece of bipartisan legislation. We appreciate your thorough consideration of this legislation and welcome the opportunity to discuss further. Please feel free to contact FAS Wildfire Policy Specialist James Campbell at jcampbell@fas.org with any further questions.

Sincerely,

Hannah Safford, Ph.D.
Associate Director of Climate & Environment, FAS

cc Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry