

Promoting Effective Forest Management Act of 2023

Senator Barrasso and Senator Manchin

America's National Forests are facing a wildfire crisis. Roughly 63 million of the 193 million acres of the National Forest System is at either high or very high risk of catastrophic wildfires predominantly because they are overstocked, and they are in need of forest restoration treatments to reduce their risk and restore their health. In particular, mechanical thinning treatments are needed in many forests to reduce mortality or to make way for safe and effective prescribed fire treatments. While the Forest Service has repeatedly acknowledged that a "paradigm shift" is needed in how they manage our National Forests, meaningful progress has been slow in returning our National Forests to a healthy and manageable state.

The Promoting Effective Management Act directs the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to utilize existing tools and resources to dramatically increase wildfire mitigation projects on National Forests and public lands, and to be transparent with the public about progress made. The bill would:

- **Prioritize Accomplishments Over Rhetoric:** By directing the Forest Service and BLM to set annual acreage targets for mechanical thinning projects on National Forests and public lands. Under the bill, agencies are to increase their acreage targets two to four times--consistent with the Administration's wildfire strategy.
- **Increase the Use of Streamlined Authorities:** By requiring the Forest Service and BLM to gain familiarity with their existing authorities (including existing categorical exclusions and emergency authorities) in order to increase their use. Currently, these authorities often go unused, significantly slowing down projects.
- **Manage Old-Growth and Mature Forests:** By legislating that any attempts to redefine scientific terms (*e.g.*, old-growth forests, mature forests) must be based in science and in law.
- **Report Forest Carbon Data:** By requiring the Forest Service to report if the National Forests are absorbing more carbon than they are emitting (for example, from wildfires or disease-induced mortality).
- **Include Local Perspectives in Litigation:** By allowing counties to speak in court about the impacts on their communities of halting wildfire prevention projects in National Forests.
- **Fix a Loophole in Firefighter Retirement:** By helping stop the current forfeiture of retirement benefits for those firefighters that wish to attend to life events (*e.g.*, maternity leave) and have more than a 3-day break-in-service.
- **Prevent Further Declines in the Logging Workforce:** By improving the quality and availability of logging workforce training and apprenticeship programs.
- **Change Forest Service Culture:** By directing the Forest Service to encourage employees to become more rooted in their communities, thereby fostering better long-term partnerships between the agency and their state, local, and industry partners.

Support for the Promoting Effective Management Act includes: American Forest Resource Council, American Loggers Council, Boone and Crockett Club, Federal Forest Resource Coalition, Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, Intermountain Forest Association, Lyme Timber, Property and Environment Research Center, Mule Deer Foundation, National Alliance of Forest Owners, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Public Lands Council, Family Farm Alliance, and WY Stock Growers Association.