

**Dr. Peter Goldmark, Commissioner of Public Lands
Washington State Department of Natural Resources**

I'd like to thank Senators Murkowski, Cantwell, Wyden and Crapo for their leadership and dedication to improving response and resources for wildfires. I appreciate the invitation to appear before you today.

My name is Peter Goldmark, and I am the Commissioner of Public Lands for the state of Washington. Elected directly by the people of my state, I am charged with managing and protecting Washington's natural resources.

That responsibility includes leading our state's fight against wildfire and overseeing forest health across all jurisdictions.

It has been a heavy responsibility to bear. We have lost about 3.5 percent of Washington state to wildfire over the last two catastrophic years. And most terrible of all was the death of three young firefighters, who died protecting homes during the Twisp River fire last August.

The impact on our people and the landscape has been horrific to witness.

In Washington, our extreme climatic conditions have created a hotter, drier landscape. Our forests are sick, and ripe for fire.

For too many years, investments in forest health, thinning and fuel reduction have not kept pace with the amount of risk on the landscape.

We know what we need to do to allow Washington to remain the Evergreen State. We must aggressively treat and manage our forests, using fuel-reduction treatments and prescribed burning when appropriate.

There is broad community and scientific support for accelerated forest restoration. I encourage you to develop the pine-pilot concept discussed in Title Three, Subtitle D, to achieve faster restoration.

We depend on our forests for clean water, wildlife habitat, jobs and carbon storage. They are a resource to conserve and protect, not to squander.

Since I took office in 2009, I've secured almost \$25 million in state investment to build resilient forests. Federal investment has not kept up. This legislation would end the practice of fire borrowing that robs from prevention and fuel-treatment programs.

However, it does not address the continued structural erosion of the Forest Service land management budget by rising fire costs. A different budget formulation that eliminates use of the 10-year average of suppression costs, or at least freezes it in time, is crucial to a realistic federal wildfire budget policy.

Failure to fix this problem will trap us in a cycle of more costly fires, driven by worsening forest conditions.

Title Two of the discussion draft offers sensible proposals that have potential to enhance the safety and effectiveness of wildland firefighting across the country.

Credentials for firefighters and aircraft must be standardized to ensure safe and rapid response wherever wildfire threatens.

We must expand our use of drones and retardant aircraft, to keep fires small. A location tracking system will help keep fire crews safe.

Expanded use of Firewise programs and fire-risk maps will give communities the knowledge and tools to prepare for wildfire.

And improved telecommunications infrastructure will help people who live in fire-prone areas keep track of evacuations and road closures, as wildfire threatens their homes.

I believe we are at a critical moment. These last two wildfire seasons are a brutal warning. We must now do the vital work, as described in this discussion draft, to prepare for and respond to wildfire.

