

**Hearing On the President's FY 2023 Budget Request for the
U.S. Forest Service**

Thursday, June 9, 2022

Chairman Manchin's Opening Statement

- The committee will come to order.
- I am pleased to welcome the Chief of the Forest Service to the Committee to discuss President Biden's Fiscal Year 2023 Budget request for the Forest Service.
- Chief Moore, as this is your first time testifying before the Committee, I want to publicly congratulate you on your appointment to Chief of the Forest Service, as well as thank you for joining us this morning.
- I know that we have a lot to discuss today, from the billions of dollars provided by the Great American Outdoors Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law over the last two years to the historic wildfire burning right now in New Mexico.
- But first, I'd like to express my appreciation for the emphasis placed on outdoor recreation in this year's budget request.
- I am glad to see that the President is making outdoor recreation a policy priority for the land management agencies, including the Forest Service.
- Earlier this month, our Committee unanimously voted to report *America's Outdoor Recreation Act of 2022*—our large outdoor recreation package that illustrates the important role the outdoors play in the hearts and minds of all Americans.

- The last time outdoor recreation legislation of this size and scale was enacted was in 1963, so I'm very proud of this package and the good I believe it will do.
- The overwhelming support we have received for this package shows us that the enthusiasm surrounding our public lands and outdoor recreation is strong and growing.
- To keep up with increased visitation, this package provides innovative approaches that are needed to make our public lands more accessible, improve our recreation infrastructure, and make it easier for businesses located in rural areas to thrive.
- Now, turning to the primary purpose of today's hearing—the President's budget.
- Rural communities across the country depend on our National Forests.
- They provide opportunities for recreation as well as timber resources, and thereby support jobs in local communities.
- But despite a more-than-a-quarter-of-a-billion dollar increase last year in your annual appropriations, and an additional \$5.5 billion made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, I understand the President's Budget requests a further billion-dollar increase for Forest Service programs above the record-high that Congress appropriated last year.
- I look forward to learning why these increases are needed and for what specific purposes this money would be used.
- As I mentioned, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided the Forest Service \$5.5 billion for implementing a variety of wildfire and ecological restoration initiatives.

- But the main thing included in the wildfire management section—listed right at the beginning—was direction to your agency to lower the fire risk on 10 million acres of the Country’s most dangerous 20 million acres.
- The law requires the Forest Service to use this unprecedented level of funding, as well as other funding that Congress is continuing to provide, to significantly lower the fuel load in National Forests where both communities are nearby and wildfires would be extremely difficult to control.
- The law also required the Forest Service to publish a plan detailing how you will treat these acres. This plan was due by last March, but the Forest Service has yet to release it.
- I would like to know how many of these acres you are projecting to change the conditions on this year, and I intend to ask you or your staff about your progress in meeting this requirement at each hearing going forward.
- In the Infrastructure-funding spending-plan that you included with your budget request, I saw over and over that the biggest challenge you are facing to spending this money are “shortages of acquisition and procurement staff, grants and agreements staff, and National Forest program staff responsible for the implementation of the activities outlined.”
- I am sure we will discuss this morning how long you believe it will take for you to ramp up your capacity to spend this money, but I hope it is soon.
- The fire season is well underway out West; and the government must carry out these important treatments as soon as possible.

- In closing, it is no secret that I have serious concerns about our Nation's debt; and, as such, I take my role as both an authorizer and appropriator very seriously.
- I fully believe we can get our fiscal house in order while supporting American priorities.
- So I look forward to hearing from Chief Moore this morning about how we can do just that.
- And with that, I'll turn it over to Ranking Member Barrasso for his opening remarks.