

LEGISLATIVE HEARING

Thursday, October 21, 2021

Chairman Senator Joe Manchin Opening Statement

- The committee will come to order.
- This morning we are here to discuss a number of pieces of legislation related to wildfires and to forestry.
- These bills represent the priorities of many members on both sides of the aisle, including several members of the Committee.
- I also want to welcome Senator Bennet to this committee as he joins us this morning to talk about his bill.
- In May of this year our committee discussed how forests absorb and store carbon emissions, the role that forestry can play in addressing climate change, and how forest management is central to addressing wildfires.
- Over the subsequent four months, we witnessed communities across the West again suffer catastrophic loss of life and property from horrific wildfires.
- I stand by my Western colleagues and am ready to work with each of you.
- We must commit to taking the necessary proactive mitigation steps going forward, particularly those that are cost-effective and have a proven track record of success.

- This perennial issue is worsening every year, and the fire agencies stand to greatly benefit from several of the bills on today's agenda.
- Now that rain has fallen across much of the West, tamping down this season's wildfires, we must get to work to get ahead of our Country's wildfire problem.
- Specifically, we need enduring, long-term solutions put in place.
- Our Committee has talked at length about how many of our country's forests are unhealthy and in need of restoration.
- And it's critical that we include forests and wildfires in our conversations about carbon emissions.
- That is why Ranking Member Barrasso and I, along with Senators King and Marshall, introduced the America's Revegetation and Carbon Sequestration Act.
- Our bill has been praised by dozens of groups, including The Nature Conservancy, the timber industry, a number of national forestry groups, and sportsmen and women groups—like the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.
- It authorizes agencies like the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to accept money from outside organizations that want to invest in wildfire prevention projects because they see the carbon benefits of these projects.

- Our bill also contains proactive measures related to revegetation and expanded use of wood products—both activities that have been shown to help rural economies.
- I'm particularly excited about a provision related to revegetating abandoned mined lands, and am very grateful for Chief Johansen to have made the drive here today from West Virginia to speak to us in detail about this initiative.
- There are eight other bills on this morning's agenda.
- While many of these bills are broadly supported, I understand a few are controversial.
- Senator Daines has two bills that address the litigation problem that sometimes hinders important forestry projects.
- While I support addressing this important issue, I want to be sure it is done—first, in a way that will procedurally work for the agencies and all the parties involved; and second, in a way that does not have unintended consequences.
- I believe this morning's topic is unique because the solutions that we will be discussing not only enable all of us to do that, but they can also make a tremendous impact in our Nation's climate efforts and in addressing our Nation's wildfire problem.
- I those should be the type of solutions that both parties can rally behind.
- With that, I'll turn it over to Ranking Member Barrasso for his opening statement.