

House Natural Resource Committee- Federal Lands Subcommittee

17 April 2024

Overview: The House Natural Resource Committee met to discuss the draft of H.R. ____ by [Rep. Westerman](#) (R-AR) “To expedite under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and improve forest management activities on National Forest System lands, on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, and on Tribal lands to return resilience to overgrown, fire-prone forested lands, and for other purposes.”

Highlights:

- Rep. Westerman explained that this bill would incentivize collaboration with state and Tribal governments by removing inflexible requirements.
- Intertribal Timber Council’s Cody Desautel commended this bill for the inclusion of Tribal specific provisions, including the use of Good Neighbor Authority, cultural burning, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
 - Desautel recommended to the committee that provisions be added that will allow states and Indian Tribes to identify and request additional areas for assessment and treatment.
- Many representatives as well as witnesses voiced their support for the inclusion of Good Neighbor Authority in this bill.

Witnesses:

- [Chris French](#)- Deputy Chief of the National Forest System in the U.S. Forest Service
 - [Written Statement](#)
- [Cody Desautel](#)- President of the [Intertribal Timber Council](#) & Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the [Colville Reservation](#)
 - [Written Statement](#)
- [Hannah Downey](#)- Policy Director of the Property and Environment Research Center
 - [Written Statement](#)
- [Jim Parma](#)- Eastern Fiber Manager of Bell Lumber and Pole
 - [Written Statement](#)
- [Dr. Kimiko Barrett](#)- Wildfire Research and Policy Lead of Headwaters Economics
 - [Written Statement](#)

General Notes:

- Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AR) explained that the legislation that he is proposing will empower streamlined forest management projects to take place on a landscape scale in the areas at the highest risk for catastrophic wildfires. This bill also further incentivizes collaboration with state and Tribal governments by removing inflexible requirements that limit categorical exclusions to a paltry 3000 acres when those authorities are used in collaboration with a state governor, or Indian Tribe.

- This legislation includes providing full partnership to Tribes and counties under the [Good Neighbor Authority](#).
- [Rep. Pete Stauber](#) (R-MN) and witness Hannah Downey both voiced their approval for the provisions of the Good Neighbor Authority to allow counties and Tribes to fully participate.
- Cody Desautel opened by telling the committee about the unprecedented wildfire impacts that the Colville reservation has seen since 2015, and that many Tribes have had similar experiences. He said that the risk of wildfire to Indian lands is compounded by the thousands of miles of shared boundary with federal agencies, primarily the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.
 - Desautel also said that Tribes are impacted by limited suppression resources due to priority placed on fires burning and unmanaged federal lands that pose a risk to communities and infrastructure.
 - Desautel recommended that the legislation should add provisions that allow states and Indian Tribes to identify and request additional areas for assessment and treatment. He stated that the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) appreciates that the bill authorizes Tribes to request participation and fire shared assessments.
 - “Tribes are best suited to define risk strategies for reducing those risks and determining the benchmark goals for their communities. For the sake of parity, we request the Tribal Forest Protection Act projects be provided the same implementation authorities, such as emergency [NEPA](#) procedures and categorical exclusions.”
 - “While Tribes understand the importance of environmental review, we also understand the potential impacts of taking no action.”
 - Desautel further stated that the ITC appreciates the inclusion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and cultural burning.
 - “ITC supports the bill’s provisions that address full Tribal inclusion in the Good Neighbor Authority and adding the Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service to that authority.”
- Rep. Westerman (R-AR) said that the committee’s goal is to give more authority to Tribes to manage their lands and to go out on the federal estate and do management. He then asked if the Colville Tribes would be open to managing the lands that join their forest so they could keep any federal fires from coming in on their land.
 - Desautel answered that the Colville Tribes would be a very willing partner in that, further stating that they have Tribal Forest Protection Act projects that are working through the NEPA process.
- Rep. [Cliff Bentz](#) (R-OR) asked Desautel if he agrees with the bill’s suggestions to use watersheds as a foundation for protecting forests.
 - Desautel agreed that watersheds are an appropriate scale to look at treatments.
- Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) asked Jim Parma to share his thoughts about expanding Good Neighbor Authority to Tribes and Counties.
 - Parma answered that Good Neighbor Authority gives more opportunities to get more acreage treated in the National forests. He said that [Bell Lumber and Pole] has multiple

Tribes and counties with forestry programs that make timber sales, so more opportunities would give more people boots on the ground to get things done.