

September 23, 2024

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1334 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Scott Peters
Congressman
U.S. House of Representatives
1201 Longworth Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 8790, the Fix Our Forests Act

Dear Chairman Westerman and Congressman Peters:

The undersigned organizations support H.R. 8790, the Fix Our Forests Act. Thank you for introducing this important bipartisan legislation and for your leadership in addressing forest health needs and wildfire challenges. Improving the health of our nation's forested lands and protecting communities and watersheds is critically important, and we are pleased that the House of Representatives will be considering the bill this week.

We represent a broad coalition of stakeholders that includes water providers, farmers, utilities, businesses, forestry professionals, counties and local governments. We are deeply committed to advancing forest and watershed health. We support the Fix Our Forests Act's comprehensive approach to improving forest and watershed health. Enacting H.R. 8790 will help protect our communities and address forest health needs by fostering collaboration between federal agencies, local communities, and tribal nations, authorizing common sense environmental streamlining authorities, providing targeted litigation reform, expanding good neighbor authorities, and investing in data sharing, research, and technology.

Communities nationwide continue to face widespread destruction caused by intense wildfires. More than one-third of the U.S. population and buildings—roughly 115 million people and 48 million buildings—are in high wildfire risk counties.¹ To date in 2024, 33,631 fires have burned 6,336,634 acres nationwide.² Wildfire is an important part of a healthy ecosystem. However, the catastrophic wildfires that are becoming more common often burn with a severity that falls outside historic norms.³ Catastrophic fires threaten public health and safety, and adversely affect community resilience and infrastructure. Catastrophic fires can also impact water supplies. Almost 90% of the people served by

¹ U.S. Forest Service: *Updates to Wildfirerisk.org Identify Communities with Increased Risk and Provide Resources to Mitigate Wildfire*. May 29, 2024. <https://wildfirerisk.org/about/news/>.

² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information: *Monthly Wildfires Report*. July 2024. [August 2024 Wildfires Report | National Centers for Environmental Information \(NCEI\) \(noaa.gov\)](https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/mwr)

³ Parks, Sean A.; Holsinger, Lisa M.; Blankenship, Kori; Dillon, Gregory K.; Goeking, Sara A.; Swaty, Randy. 2023. Contemporary wildfires are more severe compared to the historical reference period in western US dry conifer forests. *Forest Ecology and Management*. 544: 121232.