



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

THE RESILIENT FEDERAL FORESTS ACT OF 2017

The “Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017,” introduced by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AR), is a bipartisan solution to address the growing economic and environmental threats of catastrophic wildfire. The legislation pairs a responsible budget fix with targeted forest management reforms to dramatically improve the health and resiliency of our nation’s forests and rangelands. The bill provides federal land management agencies immediate tools to increase the pace, scale and cost efficiency of forest management projects without sacrificing environmental protections.

Prevents Wildfires and Returns Resiliency to Federal Forests

Provides new tools that the USFS and BLM can implement immediately to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire, insect and disease infestation, damage to municipal watersheds and critical infrastructure, and dramatically improve the health and resiliency of federal forests by:

- Expediting wildfire and disease prevention projects to reduce the risk of wildfire.
- Streamlining onerous environmental review processes without sacrificing environmental protections and empowering USFS professionals to implement forest management activities.
- Making streamlined review processes available for projects up to 30,000 acres if the forest management activity is proposed by a collaborative group, Resource Advisory Committee or as part of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and for other forest management projects up to 10,000 acres.

Encourages Quick Reforestation after Large Wildfires

Streamlines environmental reviews of projects for the removal of dead trees to pay for reforestation after large wildfires by:

- Requiring an Environmental Assessment of a reforestation project be completed within two months.
- Ensuring burned areas that were previously forested, are reforested within five years. Reforestation includes: planting trees, surveying for natural regeneration, clearing vegetation around seedlings, and other activities designed to reestablish the forest on impacted lands.
- Prohibiting preliminary injunctions to ensure critical restoration work can continue while a lawsuit is being considered by the courts.

Incentivizes and Rewards Collaboration

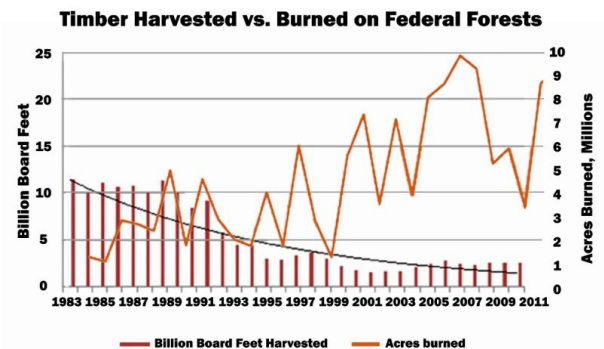
Supports collaborative efforts that bring together local governments, land managers and diverse groups of local stakeholders to work together and develop forest management projects by:

- Streamlining environmental reviews and expanding project area potential for collaboratively developed proposals.
- Requiring environmental analysis of a collaboratively developed proposal to be weighed against a “no action” alternative and the impacts of doing nothing on forest health and wildfire risk.

Ensures Protection for Sensitive Lands

Ensures the continued protection of sensitive landscapes by:

- Making it clear that authorities granted in the bill do not apply on lands in the National Wilderness Preservation System, in roadless areas and on lands where timber harvesting is prohibited by federal law.



Addresses Obstructionist Litigation

Provides a constructive alternative to obstructionist litigation that is paralyzing the active management missions of our federal land managers. The legislation promotes the quick resolution of litigation against forest projects by:

- Establishing a new arbitration pilot program that requires litigants opposing a forest management activity to come to the table with an alternative forest management proposal rather than just saying “no” to forest management.
- Limits the ability of fringe litigants to access taxpayer funds to support obstructionist lawsuits.

Improves Habitat for Forest Dependent Species

The national forests have limited and shrinking amounts of early seral habitat, the bill improves wildlife habitat by:

- Encouraging and increasing the pace and scale of wildlife habitat improvement for wild turkey, ruffed grouse, elk, deer and other “early seral” forest-dependent species.
- Streamlining bureaucratic processes that could otherwise delay early seral habitat projects up to 10,000 acres.

Empowers Local Governments and Local Decision Making

The legislation provides new resources and greater flexibility to local governments by:

- Authorizing revenue sharing with counties for stewardship contracting projects.
- Providing additional flexibility in how local governments can utilize Title III.
- Streamlining appointments to USFS and BLM Resource Advisory Committees and ensuring local representation on the committees.
- Requiring a portion of Title II funds to be spent on locally developed projects that generate economic activity through the sale of forest products.
- Ensuring agency coordination with county governments and concurrence with regional offices prior to obliterating roads in high fire danger areas.

Establishes a Revolving Fund to Advance Locally Supported Restoration Work

Allows states to fund forest management activities on national forests by:

- Creating a new “State-Supported Forest Management Fund.” (Montana, New Mexico and Oregon have made efforts to support national forest projects to prevent wildfire.
- Empowering states, local governments and other key stakeholders to invest their own funds in critical, locally proposed forest management activities.
- Allowing revenues generated from locally developed projects to be reinvested into the forest.
- Does not authorize new federal appropriations.

Bolsters Tribal Participation in Forest Health Projects

Builds upon existing authorities to:

- Allow tribes to petition federal land managers to conduct forest management activities to reduce the risk of wildfire, insects and disease on federal lands where tribes have an interest.

Permanently Solves the Wildfire ‘Borrowing’ Problem

In bad fire years, when the USFS or BLM exhaust all their firefighting funding, they must ‘borrow’ from other non-fire accounts to pay for wildfire suppression. Ironically, many of these accounts fund forest restoration and management activities that help in preventing future wildfires. H.R. 2936:

- Authorizes FEMA to transfer limited funds to the USFS or BLM when the rest of their wild fire suppression funding has been exhausted.
- Continues Congressional oversight and appropriation of wildfire suppression funds. Provides a fiscally responsible solution to end fire borrowing without authorizing new mandatory spending.