

House Natural Resources Committee
Written Testimony and Oral Statement
10.27.2021
Lucas Mayfield
Vice President – Grassroots Wildland Firefighters

I would first like to thank the House Natural Resources Committee for this opportunity. My name is Lucas Mayfield and I spent 18 years employed by the United States Forest Service. I worked in 4 regions and on 7 forests. My last 12 years were spent on Interagency Hotshot Crews. I started as a rookie crewmember and was able to serve in every position from crewmember to Detailed Superintendent.

Working for the United States Forest Service and in particular as a Hotshot is the most gratifying job that I will ever have. It is the foundation of me as a person. For 18 years and through today I have operated off of the values of Duty, Respect, and Integrity. Adding to that would be the words, character, accountability, attitude and effort.

The most gratifying job I have ever had serving the American public was also the reason that I chose to resign in March of 2019. Half way towards retirement eligibility I left regular government service due to the toll it was taking on me mentally. This job and the demands that are placed on Federal Wildland Firefighters led to seasonal depression, anxiety, and the thoughts that my family would be better off with a life insurance check.

I left for an income that was plannable, livable, and allowed me to put my family first for the first time. I also left for the opportunity to take part and standup a cohesive movement that would initiate and advocate for change within the federal wildland system. I am here today because I have not left my fire family. The Grassroots Wildland Firefighters are comprised of current, retired, and resigned Federal Wildland Firefighters. We stood up in 2019 in order to provide a cohesive effort and voice for a population of quiet professionals. Our motto is, "Nothing About Us, Without Us". Since our inception we have been advocating based off of our four pillars that we believe to be directly related and require a cohesive and simultaneous approach.

The four pillars of Grassroots Wildland Firefighters;

1. Wildland Firefighter Classification, Pay, and Benefits
2. Comprehensive Health and Wellbeing
3. Expanded Workforce
4. Federal Wildland Fire Service

We have to take care of the existing workforce. A workforce that is comprised of some of the finest civilian public servants in the world. A workforce that responds nationally to wildfires regardless of jurisdiction. A workforce that is on the frontlines of climate change. A workforce that has responded to hurricane relief, shuttle recovery, and 9/11. A workforce that includes

those in secondary and primary fire positions such as; dispatchers, fire managers, hotshots, smokejumpers, engine personnel, rappellers, Heliattack, and many others.

The Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act of 2021 is the most comprehensive and well thought out piece of legislation that will address the needs of our Federal Wildland Firefighters, that have been historically misclassified, underpaid, and often times left uncared for. Tim's Act directly addresses the needed reforms as it pertains to Wildland Firefighter Classification, Pay, Benefits, and Comprehensive health and wellbeing. This is what right looks like and it is long overdue. This is the legislation that would have kept me employed by the United States Forest Service and will stop the exodus that is currently occurring while adding to the needed capacity.

If the United States is to stand a chance in battling catastrophic wildfire, we need to ensure that we have a robust and mobile national response mechanism in place. This legislation ensures that we retain and recruit the workforce needed to defend communities, public lands, and critical infrastructure.

My hope is that the members of this committee, and Congress at large fully recognize the need for the passage of Tim's Act

Fire suppression and the preparation to suppress wildland fire is a 365 day a year job. We all need to recognize and accept the fact that we do not have the capacity to respond to wildland fires and manage the land. Land Management Agencies employ wildland firefighters and The Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act will allow them to treat them as such in reality and not just in the news and in death.

If we are the leaders in the wildland fire service and land management then we need to support it and build it for the future. If we don't pay the cost to provide increased capacity for suppression needs and realize that there is no capacity for land management, we will continue to lose critical infrastructure, towns, first responders, and American citizens.