



January 2025

Republicans'

H.R. 471

So-Called "Fix Our Forests" Act

Republicans are using fire safety as a pretext to advance their longstanding attacks on environmental laws and fast-track a bill that doesn't fund solutions to wildfire risks, doesn't help communities like LA, and will hurt people and the environment in the long-term.

While H.R. 471 includes important measures championed by Democrats to enhance wildfire response, it fails to meet the greatest need vulnerable communities face in achieving fire safety and resilience: resources. The bill also uses the pretext of fire resiliency to achieve the longstanding GOP goals of undercutting bedrock environmental laws and dramatically limiting public input. This will surely be used by Republicans as a precedent for gutting environmental reviews on all manner of polluting projects with devastating consequences for disadvantaged communities. This bill would also allow large scale commercial logging projects to avoid environmental reviews under the guise of fire protection – however there is ample evidence that certain logging practices can actually make wildfires more severe.

This so-called Fix Our Forests Act is House Republicans' opening salvo in their age-old playbook to use crisis and catastrophe to push their usual pro-industry, anti-environment agenda. Congress should be focused on providing support for the people of Los Angeles and working to ensure land management agencies and at-risk communities have the resources they need, not rushing through a bill that undermines collaborative decision-making to score political points in the wake of a crisis. This leaves both our communities and Federal wildland firefighters in the lurch.

H.R. 471 DOESN'T MEET THE MOMENT TO PROTECT COMMUNITIES MOST AT RISK.

H.R. 471 does little to support community resilience and recovery efforts. At-risk communities need resources to plan for a more resilient and fire-adapted future. Congress should focus on disaster recovery and enhancing programs that prevent risk to the built environment and implementing the recommendations of the nonpartisan 2023 Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Report. This requires dedicated resources and support, something clearly missing from H.R. 471.

H.R. 471 REJECTS THE BIPARTISAN CALL FOR INCREASED FIREFIGHTER PAY & FUNDING.

H.R. 471 fails to capitalize on major bipartisan support for a permanent increase for federal firefighter pay, a measure that should be included in any comprehensive legislation to address wildfire. And while H.R. 471 creates new programs to support innovative ways of responding to wildfire, including biochar development and new wildfire detection devices, it fails to fund any of these new initiatives. The Forest Service is already stretched dangerously thin, and federal firefighters are underpaid. Congress needs to step up and fund these critical priorities.

H.R. 471 DOES NOT:

- 🔥 Do anything to help Los Angeles recover.
- 🔥 Increase funding for federal wildland firefighters.
- 🔥 Address the main driver of catastrophic wildfire – climate change.
- 🔥 Provide resources or funding for federal land management agencies or communities most at risk.
- 🔥 Follow the consensus recommendations of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Report about reducing community wildfire risk.

H.R. 471 IS A NEW VEHICLE FOR OLD ENVIRONMENTAL ATTACKS.

Contrary to Republican talking points, H.R. 471 is not a new or innovative "fix" for federal land management agencies; these are the same industry-requested environmental shortcuts Republicans have been pushing for years. Researchers have shown that harvests of mature trees in the name of fire prevention can actually result in increased wildfires. H.R. 471 is more of the same; it effectively short circuits the environmental review and public input requirements under NEPA under the guise of preventing catastrophic wildfire. It also includes a reckless reduction of Endangered Species Act protections, exempting the Forest Service from any requirement to consider new scientific discoveries, new species listings or new critical habitat designations once a forest plan has been approved – setting yet another dangerous precedent.

These drastic measures are unnecessary; experts repeatedly point to insufficient budgets, staffing, and technology as the primary culprits in project delays. Land management agencies like the Forest Service already have emergency authority – enhanced in the Infrastructure Law – to conduct needed activities in expansive, previously identified firehazed areas. In addition, thanks to investments secured by House Democrats in the Inflation Reduction Act, the Biden administration shortened the timeline for complex environmental reviews, including a 23 percent reduction in the time it takes to complete a final EIS.

H.R. 471 SLASHES PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND JUDICIAL REVIEW.

The public participation process is a critical way for frontline, environmental justice, and impacted communities to make their voices heard. H.R. 471 bypasses critical public input opportunities for a broad range of forest management projects by enacting largescale shortcuts of NEPA and ESA. In the name of preventing "frivolous litigation," this bill forces potential litigants to file suit preemptively to protect their right to judicial review – probably leading to more litigation, not less. Besides, gutting judicial review is largely unnecessary; a 2020 study showed that only one out of every 450 NEPA decisions are ever brought to court.

This draconian NEPA "shot clock" will crush meaningful public participation and good faith collaboration between the public, federal agencies, and project proponents to make projects better.



DEMOCRATS DELIVER

Democrats are confronting this crisis with a comprehensive approach that meets the needs of our communities and planet. We secured more than \$15 billion in historic investments through the Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to keep communities safe by restoring healthy ecosystems; promoting healthy fire through prescribed burns; reducing hazardous fuels that increase the intensity and speed of wildfires; providing planning resources to at-risk communities; and supporting better pay for wildland firefighters. Democrats also secured more than \$1 billion to staff up permitting offices, which has dramatically shortened project by upwards of 23%.

With these investments, the Biden-Harris administration has treated a record-breaking number of hazardous fuels on Forest Service lands. Over the past three years, the Forest Service—along with partners, communities, and Tribes—has treated 11.78 million acres of hazardous fuels. Keeping communities safe and confronting the wildfire crisis doesn't have to come at the cost of our environmental protections and public input.

Democrats continue to support the communities most in need and at risk due to the growing threat of wildfire. That includes introducing legislation such as the **Community Protection and Wildfire Resilience Act (Huffman, D-CA)** to help communities implement science-based methods for mitigating wildfire damage and increase resiliency, **the Tim's Act (Neguse, D-CO)**, which permanently addresses the pay and benefits of wildland firefighters, and **the Wildfire Resilient Communities Act (Hoyle, D-OR)**, which invests in combatting catastrophic wildfires through forest health and community risk reduction projects.