

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 28, 2024

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

In recent years, wildfires have become increasingly more severe and have killed hundreds of people, destroyed thousands of homes and businesses, and burned millions of acres. Due to various factors that contribute to high wildfire risk, including past forest management practices, climate change, and increased development in the wildland-urban interface, the nation's wildfire problem has become a wildfire crisis. More than one-third of the U.S. population lives in counties with high risk for wildfire. Further, over 200 million acres of federal land have been classified as having high or very high wildfire potential and in need of restoration. In this current climate, wildfire response is not just a matter of suppressing fires and treating landscapes. Much of this work is already being done through investments made by the Biden administration. To effectively respond to the ever-growing crisis, it is important that we have a holistic understanding of how the existing tools and programs available to our land management agencies are functioning. By doing so, we can begin to identify where Congress can effectively intervene and where funding is necessary.

We recognize that federal agencies alone cannot address these factors and that collaboration between federal and nonfederal agencies, including communities at risk from wildfire, is needed to mitigate wildfire risk. Federal land management agencies have worked collaboratively with communities and others to reduce wildfire risk, promote resilient communities, and improve the health and condition of federal lands. Communities are facing higher risk, and a key factor in responding is ensuring the built environment is prepared. However, it is unclear how effective current efforts have been and how we can bolster the work being done on the ground. Thus, we are requesting assessments of the following two areas:

- **Collaborative Planning for Wildfire Risk Mitigation.** Your office reported in 2017 that increasing collaborative planning, including by developing or improving Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), could help reduce fire risk to communities.<sup>1</sup> CWPPs provide opportunities for federal, Tribal, state, and local governments to work with each other, community members, and others to develop a framework that outlines local priorities for wildfire risk mitigation. However, the National Association of State Foresters estimated that, as of fiscal year 2021, only about 30 percent of communities at risk from wildfire were covered by a CWPP, and for those communities that had CWPPs, many of them were out of date. The extent to which resources are available to assist communities with CWPPs and other wildfire mitigation endeavors is unclear.

We are requesting that GAO examine (1) resources the federal land management agencies have provided to assist at-risk communities with reducing wildfire risk; (2) actions federal land management agencies have taken to help communities, including Tribal communities, develop, update, and implement CWPPs and any additional actions that could be taken; (3) the extent to which the federal land management agencies have implemented projects to reduce wildfire risk based on CWPPs.

- **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.** The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) directs the Secretary of Agriculture to fund collaboratively developed restoration proposals for priority landscapes within the National Forest System. The goals of the program include encouraging collaborative forest restoration, leveraging resources, and demonstrating that collaborative forest restoration can benefit rural economies and may reduce wildfire activity and costs. Your office's 2015 review of the Forest Service's implementation of CFLRP reported that Forest Service officials and stakeholders said that CFLRP helped increase the pace and scale of forest restoration projects.<sup>2</sup> However, you also reported challenges in implementing the program. The Forest Service has since taken steps to address these challenges, but the outcomes of these actions are unclear.

We are requesting that GAO examine (1) the Forest Service's implementation of the CFLRP program since GAO's 2015 review; (2) actions the Forest Service has taken to address challenges in implementing CFLRP projects; and (3) any additional options Forest Service officials and stakeholders have identified for improving the CFLRP.

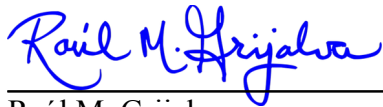
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<sup>1</sup> GAO, *Wildland Fire Risk Reduction: Multiple Factors Affect Federal-Nonfederal Collaboration, but Action Could Be Taken to Better Measure Progress*, [GAO-17-357](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jun. 9, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> GAO, *Forest Restoration: Adjusting Agencies' Information-Sharing Strategies Could Benefit Landscape-Scale Projects*, [GAO-15-398](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 11, 2015).

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact the Committee on Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee minority staff at (202) 225-6065.

Sincerely,



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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member, Committee  
on Natural Resources



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Katie Porter  
Member of Congress



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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



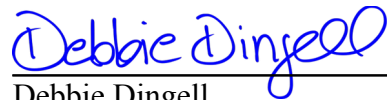
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Kevin Mullin  
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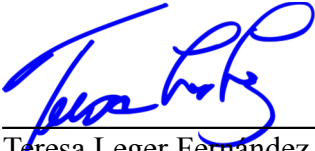
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