



Remarks of
Bill Imbergamo on behalf of FFRC
Western Caucus Forum on Green New Deal
February 27, 2019

Chairman Gosar, members of the Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Bill Imbergamo, and I'm with the Federal Forest Resource Coalition. My members buy, harvest, and process National Forest and BLM timber into products Americans use every day, from lumber, to paper to biomass energy.

We are dependent upon a natural resource that is under a stress, some of which is related to climate, but a great deal more is the result of negligence from passive management. The significant decline in timber harvest from our National Forests has left many of them in an unhealthy condition. They are not only sequestering far less carbon than they should be, they are at risk of catastrophic fire that can release significant amounts of new Greenhouse Gases. The Interior Department said last year that wildfires in California alone emitted over 68 million tons of CO₂, on par with electricity generation in the state. An older study released in 2007 estimated that wildfires accounted for about 6 percent of all US emissions. In 2017, a UC Davis researcher showed that wildfires in California equaled emissions from the States considerable vehicle emissions category.

These fires are correlated with increased summer temperatures, lower humidity, and drought. But it is important to realize that these conditions don't become critical until they are imposed on unmanaged, overstocked forests that are susceptible to carbon-releasing insect outbreaks and wildfires.

The Forest Service has designated over 85 million acres under authorities provided in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills as being at elevated risk of insects, disease, and wildfires. These stands have, by and large, have grown up in the three decades since harvest levels plummeted in the name of species protection. The Forest Service, working with my member companies and interested communities, is doing their level best to reduce fuel loads, but

because of onerous analytic requirements, they are on pace to treat these acres sometime in the next four centuries.

As you know, the Forest Service has a substantial reforestation backlog, estimated at 1.3 million acres. 85 percent of the acres requiring reforestation are the result of wildfires, not harvest. The Forest Service achieves only about 13 percent of the reforestation total in any given year. While we share the Green New Deal's view that reforestation is important, we believe the 40 million acre goal in the FAQ sheet is, to put it mildly, unrealistic. I'm not versed in the detailed reforestation needs on our National Parks or Wildlife Refuges, but to hit 40 million acres of reforestation, you would need to persuade trees to grow in places where they currently don't, such as above tree line or in the National Grasslands.

Americans are rightly concerned about climate change, and about the health of their public forests. However, solely focusing on reforestation as the Green New Deal does largely misses the mark if your goal is to increase carbon sequestration, storage, or emissions reduction from our public forests.

The best way to accomplish that is to actively manage the portions of the National Forests that are open to management – a relatively small percentage compared to the 36 million acres of wilderness and nearly 60 million acres of roadless lands. By harvesting trees, you can store carbon in long-lasting wood products, or displace fossil fuels through renewable biomass, and reestablish fast growing young trees that can suck up even more carbon. If you do it before fires burn, you can improve wildlife habitat and protect water quality in the process.

This caucus has supported legislation, the Resilient Federal Forests Act, that would accomplish these goals, including reforestation after wildfires. Forests can be a net benefit to the atmosphere, if we manage them.

Lastly, I am not an authority on our energy grid or energy policy. The Green New Deal envisions a complete decarbonizing of the U.S. economy in a decade by a mobilization led top down by the U.S. government. You'll forgive me for pointing this out, but given recent performance, many Americans are skeptical of the Federal government's ability to organize a two car parade, much less lead such a "mobilization."

Much as the stone age did not end because we ran out of stone, the age of fossil fuels will end when we find something better. The private sector is engaged in a full tilt effort to find that better alternative, and they are doing so in response to market demand. Renewable energy investments have grown six-fold in the last 15 years. Better to encourage that than lead a mandated “mobilization”. Forests can be part of that solution, if we let markets find the way.