

**Written Testimony of Wyoming State Forestry Division**  
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**Submitted to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Legislation Hearing**  
**Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining**  
**Hearing on the *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025***  
**December 2, 2025**

The Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD) is pleased to provide written testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining on S.140, the *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025*. Thank you, Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Cortez Masto, and members of the Subcommittee for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the WSFD. We are also grateful for the bill's sponsors, Senators Barrasso, Daines, Lummis, Sheehy, Risch, and Crapo.

All state forestry agencies share a common mission to conserve and protect America's forests, and most have statutory responsibilities to provide wildland fire protection, support healthy forests, and reduce fire risk on all lands, public and private. State Foresters also partner with federal land management agencies through Shared Stewardship Agreements and tools such as the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to collectively manage forests and grasslands within their respective state. Through resource sharing agreements, we help suppress wildfires on federal lands and promote wildfire risk reduction through active management.

As Wyoming's State Forester, I am responsible for managing over 263,000 acres of forested State Trust Lands and providing suppression and fire management on 3.6 million acres of State Trust Land. I am also responsible for the delivery of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service's (Forest Service) State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs to over 1.3 million acres of nonindustrial private forest lands, providing Wyoming citizens with technical and financial assistance to ensure they can manage their forests for health and fire safety. Additionally, WSFD supports our volunteer fire departments – who play a critical role in aggressive wildfire response – with a fire fabrication and maintenance facility, as well as through the Forest Service's Federal Excess Personal Property and Firefighter Property Programs. Further, WSFD utilizes the Forest Service's State Fire Assistance program funding to deliver statewide fire training and grants.

***Interagency Cooperation is Key in Wyoming and Across the Nation***

Wyoming is vast, containing 62 million acres of land, nearly half of which is federally owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the Forest Service. WSFD, as well as its fellow state forestry agencies across the nation, play a unique role as the coordinator between federal land management agencies and the local municipalities, communities, and non-profit partners across the state who all have a stake in safe and healthy landscapes. Our investment in cross-boundary management and fire suppression derives from the responsibility we have over all forestry matters in our state – whether state trust lands, private lands, or

community forests. As a result, we know where our highest risks are, where capacity lies in our communities, and work to fill in the gaps with the support of our partners.

The state is a literal checkerboard of ownership in which federal land management agencies are responsible for fire management and suppression on lands under their management, with state and local agencies having jurisdiction on those lands not owned and managed by the federal government (see *Attachment 1*). While it is important that each state, local, and federal agency respect each other's jurisdiction, effective partnerships and resource sharing are critical to safe, effective firefighting and successful initial attack. WSFD, local government, and federal agencies rely on our partnerships and a sophisticated, effective system of agreements that define each entity's responsibilities and how we share our limited resources to maximize our collective chance of success.

Like all systems, there can always be improvements. However, these agreements provide an important foundation that must be carefully considered before any sudden changes are made. Specifically, they are the framework in which local government fire departments provide fire suppression on certain federal lands, and the State and BLM coordinate on multiple single-engine airtanker (“SEAT”) bases within Wyoming. Since the start of 2025, local, state, and federal resources have responded to over 1,600 fires together in Wyoming, with each entity bringing and leveraging their fire suppression resources to support the initial attack response. One key example of interagency cooperation in the State of Wyoming is the agreement for local volunteer fire departments to provide protection for the Forest Service’s Thunder Basin National Grassland. The Thunder Basin National Grassland is over a half a million acres in size, is located within four Wyoming counties, and has one federally-staffed engine for the entire area. When a fire starts within the Thunder Basin National Grassland, local resources respond immediately with dozens of engines – many of which have come from the Federal Excess Personal Property program. These existing agreements, along with interagency cooperation, are crucial to safe, aggressive, and effective wildfire response in Wyoming.

Looking nationally, WSFD and its fellow state forestry agencies provide safe, effective wildfire response on 1.1 billion acres, a large portion of which is in the wildland-urban interface. The National Association of State Foresters is the only nonfederal entity serving on the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group at the National Interagency Fire Center. Through this role, state forestry agencies are a critical part of the national interagency coordination that provides response on federal lands and manages the nation’s largest, most complex fires. Collectively, state forestry agencies and local fire departments respond to approximately 80 percent of fires nationwide. To date in 2025, 79 percent of all fires have started within state or local jurisdictions, but only 37 percent of total acres burned were within state or local jurisdictions. Additionally, approximately one-third of state and local resources dispatched through the National Interagency Fire Center were deployed to battle fires on federal lands. State and local fire agencies have a high success rate with aggressive initial attack within their jurisdictions and offer resources comprising approximately 100,000 firefighters, 100,000 fire engines, 2,900 dozers, and 620 aircraft.

### ***The Importance of Active Forest Management on All Lands***

In addition to increasing active management on federal lands, as the *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025* seeks to do, active forest management is needed to reduce the fire threat on state and private lands and to

ensure they continue to provide forest products, clean air and water, habitat for game and non-game species, recreational opportunities, and more. Given their connectivity to neighboring federal lands, particularly in the West, the management of state and private lands is critical to the overall health of our nation's forests. By delivering Forest Service State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs, such as State Fire Assistance, WSFD promotes responsible, active forest management and equips local governments and private landowners with the tools and knowledge to understand and mitigate wildfire risk on their property, which helps protect adjacent land and nearby communities. Stable funding is needed for long-term planning and ensuring taxpayer resources are maximized in executing these missions. In addition, it is also critical that federal lands are managed to ensure they do not negatively impact the health or wildfire risk of nearby state and private lands or communities.

In August 2020, the State of Wyoming and USDA committed through a Shared Stewardship Agreement<sup>1</sup> to work together to restore forests and grasslands across all of Wyoming's land ownerships. The Agreement identifies shared principles and priorities for joint planning, pooling resources, and continued investment in existing partnerships and collaborative programs. A key example of cross-boundary cooperation and investment can be found looking at the 2024 Elk Fire. Recorded as the largest wildfire in recent history for the Bighorn National Forest, it had potential to be highly destructive, burning over numerous leased cabins on state trust lands. However, due to the coordinated efforts between state and federal partners, a large cross-boundary project that included timber harvesting and aspen enhancement stopped the fire on State Trust Lands, saving cabins, important wildlife habitat, grazing forage, and costs associated with dozer lines, retardant drops, and firefighters trying to protect this area.

Currently, Wyoming is in the process of updating our Shared Stewardship Agreement with the USDA to expand and document Wyoming's commitments to the important work we do on federal, state, and private lands. Specifically, Wyoming will be defining how the use of GNA will achieve many shared priorities of active forest management, enhancing wildlife habitat, and improving grazing forage. The Shared Stewardship Agreement will also document the intention to explore cooperative opportunities for managing recreation areas and energy development.

With the President's March 2025 Executive Order 14225 *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*<sup>2</sup>, USDA Secretarial Memo 1078-006<sup>3</sup>, and the Forest Service *National Active Management Strategy*<sup>4</sup>, there has been renewed emphasis on the role of states in assisting with the pressing challenges facing our federal forests, namely reducing catastrophic wildfire risk and revitalizing rural economies. Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon has responded to this Administration's recent efforts with an Executive Order, *Increase of Active Forest Management in Wyoming*.<sup>5</sup> The order recognizes that 48 percent of Wyoming is federal land and that federal land management agencies and the state "heavily rely" on local fire cooperators to assist in fire suppression response. The order also recognizes that since 2017, GNA has

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wy-shared-stewardship.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/immediate-expansion-of-american-timber-production/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-006.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/national-active-forest-management-strategy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [EO 2025-04 Increase of Active Forest Management in Wyoming 8.1.2025.pdf](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/EO_2025-04_Increase_of_Active_Forest_Management_in_Wyoming_8.1.2025.pdf)

served as an important tool to increase active management on Wyoming's federal lands. It directs WSFD to increase the active forest management and fuels mitigation projects to the maximum extent practicable. Since 2017, WSFD has contracted 98 projects, on 19,732 federal acres, with 62 of those projects being timber sales which have sold approximately 57 million board feet of federal timber on 12,000 acres through GNA. These projects have been completed on six national forests in the Rocky Mountain and Intermountain Regions, as well as two BLM Districts. WSFD has also partnered with the Bureau of Reclamation to implement critical fuels mitigation projects within a State Park to protect State of Wyoming recreation infrastructure. We look forward to the continued increase of these outputs.

Nationally, GNA has been utilized by over two-thirds of state forestry agencies since its enactment in the 2014 Farm Bill. In this time, 13 state forestry agencies in the Western United States have reported a cumulative 170 agreements with the Forest Service, completing over 66,000 acres of fuels and forest health projects and 291 timber sales across almost 98,000 acres. These timber sales have generated over 840 million board feet of timber and a combined net value in excess of \$80 million. However, the ability for GNA to meet the current national needs on federal lands is dependent on four critical levers: 1) sustaining the Forest Service's State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs, 2) integrating State and Federal planning for activities, treatments, and long-term goals, 3) dedicated and predictable funding for state GNA projects, and 4) state discretion and operational autonomy under GNA to act effectively on necessary active forest management. Across the nation, state forestry agency staff with GNA responsibilities are frequently supported by a broad range of federal funding, including State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs, and a recent survey indicated that, on average, state forestry agencies would lose 20 percent of their workforce capacity if the programs were defunded, with individual agency losses as high as 80 percent.

Additionally, the role of dedicated and predictable funding for WSFD to perform GNA cannot be overstated, particularly due to Wyoming's limited timber markets. Without robust markets, the initial work accomplished through GNA generates insufficient receipts for reinvestment in further management projects across shared boundaries. Given the request for states to contribute to the Forest Service's goal of increasing timber harvest and mitigating wildfire risk, additional federal resources will be required to bolster state GNA programs and projects. It will take time to develop sustainable, self-funding markets.

### ***Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025***

WSFD applauds the Trump Administration's focus on addressing the urgent management needs on federal lands. As identified by USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins in her April 3, 2025 *Secretarial Memo 1078-006*, "National Forests are in crisis due to uncharacteristically severe wildfires, insect and disease outbreaks, invasive species, and other stressors whose impacts have been compounded by too little active management." These concerns – coupled with other environmental safety factors and strategic suppression decisions – all too often lead to wildfires that cross from federal lands into state and local jurisdictions.

While the *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025* contains many discrete tools and directives, taken together, the legislation seeks to increase and create healthy accountability for the active management of the Forest Service and BLM lands while enhancing forest health and reducing fire danger at a greater scale. Three key aspects of this are the mandating and escalation of mechanical commercial and non-commercial thinning and prescribed fire goals (Sec. 101), comprehensively and accurately reporting acres treated (Sec. 102 and Sec. 103), and the effectiveness of those treatments (Sec. 105). The importance of accomplishment data and performance metrics cannot be understated. In fact, the National Association of State Foresters is currently working in partnership with the Forest Service, DOI, and private partners to establish a national reporting mechanism to capture and report fuels reduction accomplishments on all lands. This system will capture each treatment that takes place on every acre but ensure that no matter how many activities it takes to effectively reduce the fuels on an acre, it is counted only once. This will provide accurate reporting of acres treated and the true cost and workload, so Congress and taxpayers can clearly understand both the costs and benefits of proactive land management.

To assist with increasing management activities, the legislation provides a number of new and expanded authorities (Sec. 201, 202, 203, and 205) to streamline Forest Service and BLM project implementation, including establishing a new categorical exclusion for high-priority hazard trees. The *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025* also mandates further, targeted use of congressionally-created Categorical Exclusions and other streamlined authorities for environmental review in areas identified for high insect and disease mortality or have a very high or high wildfire hazard potential (Sec. 301). WSFD particularly appreciates streamlining processes for federal land managers and electric utility owners or operators to perform needed vegetation management around electric transmission and distribution facilities. Categorical Exclusions and other measures that meaningfully streamline the NEPA process and reduce frivolous lawsuits on federal projects are necessary for increasing the pace and scale of federal land management and associated cross-boundary work. Increased active management of federal lands is needed to keep America's communities safe from wildfire and to ensure our federal forests can continue to provide clean water, agriculture opportunities, building materials, provide for our recreation and hunting grounds, and sustain our traditions and ways of life.

Finally, the legislation promotes the deployment of new and innovative wildfire prevention, detection, communication, and mitigation technologies in an across-government Public-Private Wildfire Technology Deployment and Testbed Partnership (Sec. 302). Technological advances are changing the way we prepare for, detect, and fight wildfires. We appreciate provisions in the bill that support the rapid adoption of emerging technologies by creating a pilot program for new and innovative wildfire prevention, detection, communication, and mitigation technologies. State forestry agencies have been deploying privately available technologies; for instance, WSFD has recently deployed advanced detection and monitoring technologies for interagency response near communities. We would like to work with the Subcommittee to ensure state forestry agencies are incorporated into the planning and deployment of new technologies within the interagency fire system as well as in the identification of key technology priorities.

## ***Conclusion***

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today and provide testimony on behalf of WSFD. We appreciate the ongoing work of this Subcommittee to provide federal and state forest managers with tools that increase the pace and scale of active forest management, cross-boundary work, and rapid and effective response to insects, disease, and other forest health issues. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee on the *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025* and its other legislative efforts to ensure America's forests are healthy and communities are safe from the risk of catastrophic wildfire.



*Attachment 1*

