



Statement for the Record from Laurel Harkness
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Submitted to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources'
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Legislative Hearing on Pending Legislation
October 25, 2023

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) would like to thank the subcommittee for considering legislation to maximize the efficiency of public lands management and address the wildfire crisis. RVCC is an inclusive movement comprised of rural community advocates, regional and national conservation organizations, environmentalists, business owners, federal and state land managers, researchers, county and state government, and foundations.

RVCC supports bipartisan solutions that provide much-needed resources and authority to mitigate the impact of wildfires. Specifically, robust resources for training and education to expand the use of prescribed fire, an essential tool for actively managing our nation's forests, would go a long way to mitigate devastating wildfires. We support many of the provisions included in the legislation recently considered by the subcommittee, including:

- The **FIRESHED Act's (S. 1719)** establishment of emergency fireshed management areas and authorization of prescribed burning as an eligible project within such areas;
- Funding for private landowners to conduct prescribed burns in the **Western Wildfire Support Act of 2023 (S. 1764)**; and
- Prescribed fire as a treatment option for invasive grasses in the **America's Revegetation and Carbon Sequestration Act of 2023 (S. 2991)**.

While we strongly support the creation of additional Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERIs) across the west and the intent of the **Utah Wildfire Research Institute Act of 2023 (S. 2151)**, we are concerned that the bill currently does not authorize increased appropriations. The establishment of a new institute without additional funding may diminish the capabilities of existing SWERIs by shrinking the funding pool. We urge the committee to authorize additional appropriations with the creation of any new SWERI.

We also support the **Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2023 (S. 2581)** and its extension of the SRS program. SRS is a lifeline for rural communities without the tax base to support the development of schools, roads, and other essential municipal projects.

We urge committee passage the above legislation so that it may be considered and voted on by the full Senate. As the subcommittee and full committee continue to consider and develop legislation through the remainder of the 118th Congress, we strongly recommend the following:

- Additional resources for education and training to expand the use of prescribed fire;
- Dedicated funding for community-based and collaborative conservation capacity;
- Expansion of tribal co-management authorities and incorporation of indigenous knowledge in the use of prescribed fire.

We again thank the committee for advancing legislation that expands authority to conduct prescribed fires and provides vital resources to rural communities. We appreciate your time and consideration.