



Statement for the Record from Laurel Harkness

Coalition Director

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition

Submitted to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing to “Examine the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Final Report to
Congress”

March 12, 2024

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) would like to thank the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for hosting a hearing on the findings and recommendations of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Report. RVCC is a group of rural community advocates, regional and national conservation organizations, business owners, federal and state land managers, and foundations focused on land stewardship and aligned economic development across the West.

Through our coalition, we support and advance policies that promote wildfire resilience using a collaborative, place-based approach to land restoration and stewardship. To accomplish this, we support the Commission’s recommendations for greater cross-boundary partnerships, collaboration, and funding (*see e.g.*, Recommendations 18, 24-26, 126). We echo Wyoming State Forester, Ms. Kelly Norris, and her support for the Good Neighbor Authority. This program and other “all lands, all hands” approaches to forest management are effective means to accomplish wildfire mitigation in the West.

Furthermore, RVCC supports the Commission’s recommendations for the increased use of beneficial fire, including cultural burning and prescribed fire (*see e.g.*, Recommendations 10-16). During the hearing, we appreciated the support Senators and Witnesses expressed towards prescribed fire as a means for both wildfire mitigation and ecological restoration. We support the increased application of beneficial fire so communities can better restore their landscapes, mitigate wildfire risk, and manage the impacts of smoke.

In addition, we want to highlight the testimony of the Executive Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and President of the Intertribal Timber Council, Mr. Cody Desautel. His testimony pertaining to the wood products industry and Tribal authorities aligns with RVCC’s values of place-based landscape management and economic development. A healthy local wood products sector is vital for accomplishing the fuel reductions goals recommended by the Commission (*see e.g.*, Recommendations 17-23); and a strong government-to-government relationship with Tribes can meaningfully incorporate Indigenous land management priorities and knowledge into wildfire project planning and preparedness (*see e.g.*, Recommendations 28-31, 140, 141).

Lastly, we want to express strong support for the Recommendations and hearing testimony focused on uplifting the wildland fire workforce (see e.g., Recommendations 84-103). Congressional support for the increased recruitment, retention, training, pay, wellbeing, and housing of our wildland firefighter will go a long way towards protecting and uplifting our rural communities. A permanent pay fix for our federal wildland firefighters is urgent and necessary.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please don't hesitate to reach out if we can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurel Harkness". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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