

**Opening Statement
ESA and Wildfire Legislative Hearing
Representative Ed Markey
July 24, 2012**

Thank you, Chairman Hastings.

This summer tens of thousands of people have had to evacuate because of wildfires. Hundreds of homes have been destroyed. Lives have been lost.

As this fire season has heated up so has the rhetoric from the Majority. Environmental laws, land management agencies, litigation, endangered species, and even immigrants share the Republican's blame for this year's devastating wildfires.

An analysis of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management projects to reduce the risk of fires reveals that these Republican accusations are just a smokescreen.

Today, I am releasing a report that torches the myth that citizens engaging in democracy are turning our forests into tinder boxes.

Using the same approach taken by the Government Accountability Office in 2010, the Democratic staff looked at the over 8000 projects identified by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management for hazardous fuel reduction from 2009 through 2011. The report finds that 95% of all projects subject to review moved forward without pause. In total, only 27 projects, or 0.3%, were cancelled because of concerns raised during the appeals process.

There is an even smaller impact of appeals related to endangered species concerns. Of the 27 projects that were cancelled in the last two years, only 3 were due to concerns over imperiled wildlife.

In comparison, target shooters in Utah alone have already caused 21 fires this summer.

So if endangered species aren't the reason for catastrophic wildfires, what is?

One immediate answer is that funding to reduce the risk of fire is at the lowest level since 2000.

But no amount of money will be sufficient, unless we acknowledge the link between climate change and wildfires.

The Undersecretary of Agriculture, Harris Sherman, has admitted this link exists.

The Chief of the Forest Service has admitted this link exists

Scientists around the world have proven this link exists.

We are approaching dust-bowl-like drought conditions. Fires are becoming larger and more severe. And the root cause of this push to the extremes is climate change.

Last week, a massive chunk of ice twice the size of Manhattan broke off of the Petermann Glacier in Greenland, and scientists point to warming ocean temperatures as the culprit. I have suggested that we rename it Denier Island, where those who question the science behind global warming can spend the summer cooling off and escaping the heat waves, the drought and the wildfires here in the United States.

Today we will hear a lot of talk about the need for action on wildfires. When given the opportunity in June to provide state and federal agencies more tools to thin forests, all but two Republicans voted against an amendment on the House floor that would have resulted in more thinning.

I voted for that measure. I have also put forward legislation with my colleagues Representatives Grijalva, Napolitano, Lujan, Costa and Polis that recognizes we have a problem in our forests.

Our bill allows the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management the flexibility to do thinning in areas impacted by insects and disease without waiving environmental laws and forcing federal agencies to make decisions on projects in unrealistic timeframes.

Our bill also recognizes our constrained fiscal environment. It gives the federal agencies additional authorities they desire to stretch the federal dollars further and allows them to partner with states to reduce the cost of projects involving federal and state lands.

It is time for rational management of our nation's forest. We need to provide the resources to reduce the risk of fire. We need to give agencies the authorities, as our legislation does, to work smarter, not harder. Finally, we need to reduce the impact of climate change on our forests.

Thank You. I yield back my time.