



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Full Committee Hearing:

The State of Federal Wildland Fire Science: Examining Opportunities for Further Research & Coordination

June 29, 2021

In districts across the country, especially in the West, we are seeing more frequent and catastrophic wildfires destroying lives and property. These tragedies are only getting worse. Last year, over 10 million acres burned in this country at a cost of over \$16 billion. This year, wildfire season has already begun. With record temperatures and drought across much of the country, I fear how the season will progress.

We know that climate change is contributing to this growing threat. We also know that poor land management practices over the past several decades have allowed vegetation to accumulate – ripe for enormous infernos. Furthermore, as development creeps more into natural wildlands, more homes and businesses are put at increased risk.

Our federal science agencies provide critical support to fire managers. This includes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA, the National Science Foundation, and others. These agencies advise fire managers on fire weather conditions, monitor fire behavior and smoke plumes, and perform related fire research and monitoring. But there is need for further investment and coordination of these research efforts.

Congress must ensure that communities and firefighters have as many tools as possible to address this growing threat. This Committee is focused on moving critical science forward in a collaborative way. This is critical for us to be prepared to manage wildfires in the safest and most effective ways possible. This is top of mind for many of the Members of this Committee.

In particular, my colleague from California, Ms. Lofgren, has devoted much of her time and attention to this matter. I am glad that Representative Lofgren is working to address the gaps in wildfire science through legislation. It is vital that the best available science is used to inform operational decisions on the frontlines of wildfires. It is also crucial that robust mechanisms for collaboration and coordination are put in place. This will ensure a unified approach to wildfire management across the federal government and with non-federal stakeholders.

Our expert witness panel includes those on the ground and those doing the critical research on wildfires. They will discuss the current state of wildfire science, but also what they need to do

their work more effectively. I look forward to hearing their recommendations on how this Committee can help our country better respond to our growing wildfire risk.

Thank you.