

Debate on Passage of Resilient Federal Forests Act (as prepared)

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

Mr. Speaker, I recently made a trip out to Montana to visit some of our national forests and the rural communities they border. These forests have been mismanaged for decades and the ones that have not already been destroyed are ripe to be devastated by catastrophic wildfire. Not because of some action taken by the Forest Service but just the opposite. Because of no actions, our forests are overstocked, underutilized, and unhealthy. We've seen nearly 9 million acres of forest, an area larger than the state of Maryland, go up in flames just this year spewing tens of millions of tons of carbon and thick smoke into the atmosphere. Don't get me wrong. 32,000 full time Forest Service personnel are busy and working hard trying to manage 193 million acres of timberland across our great country, but they are spinning their wheels and making very little progress. Mr. Speaker, that's a forest the size of Texas and South Carolina combined. According to scientist at the Forest Service, 80 million acres of that, an area the size of New Mexico, is in a condition that is subject to catastrophic wildfire. These fires are not only creating a forest health crisis, they are a public health crisis. They kill trees, they kill wildlife and livestock, and these fires not only kill livelihoods, they create unbearable health concerns and living conditions with their thick smoke and ash. On top of all of that, they are killing people. It shouldn't be this way and it doesn't have to be this way.

This bill simply allows sound, scientific based forestry practices like the ones I learned at Yale's Forestry School to be implemented on our federal forests. It will result in cleaner air, cleaner water, better wildlife habitat, better recreational opportunities, more plant and animal biodiversity, stronger economies, and fewer fires resulting in lower fire fighting costs.

As we traveled through the beautiful countryside in Montana, I saw the symbol of our nation perched majestically atop a tree on the bank of a clear and flowing stream. This bald eagle reminded me of a fable by Aesop that describes our situation today and goes like this:

AN EAGLE was soaring through the air when suddenly it heard the whizz of an Arrow, and felt itself wounded to death. Slowly it fluttered down to the earth, with its life-blood pouring out of it. Looking down upon the Arrow with which it had been pierced, it found that the haft of the Arrow had been feathered with one of its own plumes. "Alas!" it cried, as it died, "We often give our enemies the means for our own destruction."

Mr. Speaker, our enemies aren't our colleagues across the aisle, they're not environmental extremists that are impeding science, and it's not even the United States Senate. Mr. Speaker, our enemy is catastrophic wildfire that destroys our forests, it's insects and diseases that kill our trees, and we our feathering their arrows with in action, we are feathering their arrows with bureaucratic red tape, we are feathering their actions with poor policy and they are killing our forests, killing our rural communities, and killing us every day. How much longer will we stand by and do nothing? I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to get behind this bill, pass it out of the House, and join me in relentlessly encouraging the Senate to take action. Our forests, our rural communities, our environment, and all those areas, urban and rural alike, that are breathing the smoke and ash of our once magnificent forests need us to act. Every day we delay, the problem gets worse, and the enemies of the forests are gaining ground. Please join me in the fight and vote for HR 2936...The Resilient Federal Forest Act of 2017.

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I yield back.

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