

IMPROVE FOREST AND TIMBER MANAGEMENT

Preston Brashers, Research Fellow



TOPLINE: Officials should take proactive steps to reduce the share of America's forests lost to wildfires, such as solidifying buffers from tall trees around utilities and creating strategic fuel breaks, while reducing barriers to harvesting timber.

BACKGROUND: America's forests are being mismanaged. They are dense and abundant, but extreme density combined with barriers to timber harvesting and ineffective use of forest management tools like prescribed burns, thinning, and targeted grazing have led to wildfires burning an average of about 7 million acres of U.S. lands per year (about 63% of which occurs on federal lands). The acreage burned has increased roughly threefold since the 1980s, when legal and environmental opposition led to a dramatic reduction in timber harvests. The number of acres of timber *harvested* on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands fell 80% between 1987 and 2025. In short, America has sacrificed jobs, industry, and more affordable products for wildfires, smoke, and lost property and lives—all in the name of misguided environmentalism.

Action Items (Interior Department, USDA, Congress, State and Local Officials):

- **Maintain wider vegetation buffers around utilities**, clearing fast-growing or dead trees that may be hazardous in storms.
- **Fully rescind the 2001 Roadless Area Rule**, which restricts access and makes it harder to prevent wildfires and to stop them before they spread.
- **Create and maintain an expanded strategic network of fuel breaks** in forests around communities and critical infrastructure, funded by allowing new timber harvests along the fuel breaks.
- Require the USFS and the Bureau of Land Management to **increase timber sales and contracts for the removal of vegetative material** from federal lands.
- **Pass legislation expediting environmental reviews** of forest management projects and timber harvests **and raising the threshold for legal challenges**.
- **Exempt justified prescribed burns from incurring Clean Air Act penalties** to encourage proactive forest management.

How It Would Make Life More Affordable:

- Increasing timber harvests would expand supply and help reduce the price of lumber, housing, furniture, fixtures, fencing, paper, cardboard, sawdust, and more.
- Better forest management and fewer severe wildfires would reduce risks to life and property and reduce insurance costs.
- It would also reduce lost productivity from poor air quality due to wildfire smoke.

Related Legislation: Fix Our Forests Act (H.R. 471).

BOTTOMLINE: America's abundant timber resources should be used to create more abundance for consumers, while keeping homes and people safe from wildfires.