

# WILDFIRE RESILIENCE

## *Policy Recommendations for the 118th Congress*

Identifying policy solutions to promote landscape health and community resilience to wildfire.



Fire-adapted forest near Mount Sneffels in Colorado. © Michael Danielson

**W**ildland fire plays a critical role in shaping America's landscapes, most of which are adapted to coexist and thrive with regular burning.

Indigenous peoples have long understood and embraced the critical ecological role of fire, but policies and practices over the last century have often focused on excluding wildfire from the landscape at all costs. The result is unnatural conditions across much of the country that make extreme wildfires more frequent, dangerous, and difficult to manage.

In recognition of the severity and scale of this challenge, Congress recently allocated billions of dollars for wildfire resilience through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

Recent public opinion polling research by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) indicates strong, bipartisan support for such investments amongst American voters — a reflection of the rapidly increasing public concern about wildfire risk.

This funding is a critical down payment to address the threat of wildfire, yet additional policy changes are necessary to maximize its impact. Congress must keep pace with the evolving threat of wildfire by focusing on policy interventions that can effectively build the resilience of landscapes and communities to fire.

As the manager of much of the country's forested areas, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is uniquely positioned to tackle extreme wildfire through critical forest management strategies. Congress must take advantage of all legislative opportunities to support and expand the USFS's capacity to improve wildfire resilience.

Recognizing the unique challenge and opportunity of the moment, TNC has developed a set of wildfire resilience policy recommendations for consideration in the 118th Congress.

TNC partnered with the Aspen Institute on a year-long collaborative process that brought together more than 200 experts from diverse geographies and areas of expertise to develop these recommendations, many of which are included in a newly released Wildfire Resilience Policy Roadmap.

### TNC WILDFIRE POLLING RESULTS

- Wildfire is a top-tier concern for voters, just behind issues like inflation.
- 39% of voters know someone who has been personally impacted by wildfire or smoke.
- 4 in 5 voters support increased federal investment in wildfire resilience efforts.



Controlled burn practitioner in Roslyn, Wash. © John F. Marshall

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Landscape-Scale Solutions.** Congress should support wildfire resilience on a landscape scale by:

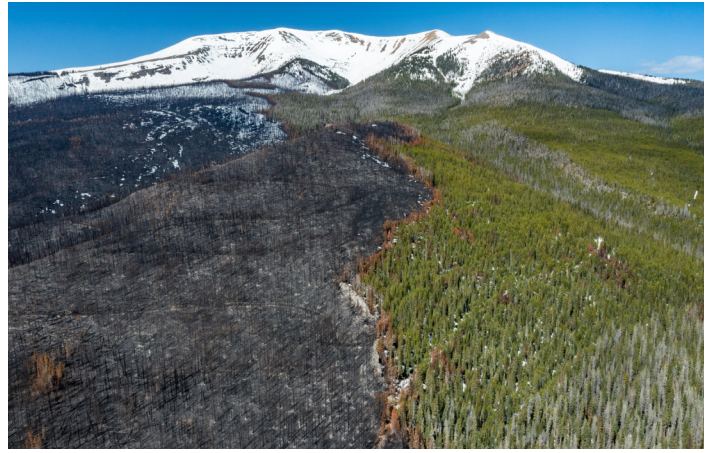
- Increasing availability of hazardous fuels funding for cross-boundary work for states, Tribal Nations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- Establishing a new or improved cost-share authority. This will allow states, Tribal Nations, and federal partners to use available funding to enter cooperative agreements for fuels projects to be implemented and funded in accordance with a cost-share formula based on a project's ownership profile and treatment types.

**Scale the Use of Controlled Burning.** Congress should promote the use of controlled burning as a forest management tool by:

- Creating a new State Prescribed Fire Assistance Program and budget line item within the USFS Private Forestry program designed to provide financial assistance to state foresters in support of workforce, planning, and implementation of prescribed fire programs, which should be incentivized to be interoperable between states.
- Allowing flexibility for states to work through Tribal Nations, NGOs and private contractors to fulfill core functions, re-grant or pass-through funds as may be needed to achieve fire management goals.
- Providing dedicated funding and expand authorities to utilize Section 638 contracts to better support Tribal Nation wildfire resilience efforts, including hazardous fuels reduction and controlled burning.

**Forest Products.** Congress should support the role of the forest products industry in building wildfire resilience by:

- Incentivizing and promoting sustainable use of wildfire resilience treatments byproducts to support all aspects of



Burned forest next to unburnt forest on Colorado's Parkview Mountain. © Jason Houston

research and development, commercialization, business development, and financing, and workforce and demand, modeled after existing interagency efforts.

- Authorizing a new contracting mechanism for fuels treatments to use and dispose of hazardous fuels byproducts unsuitable for traditional markets and treating hazardous fuels byproducts as a waste material.

**Promoting Key Partnerships.** Congress should help reduce barriers that prevent key partners from supporting federal wildfire resilience efforts by:

- Overcoming the high transaction costs of complex and multi-party agreements, including with non-traditional partners by establishing a pilot authority clarifying the ability for land management agencies to use appropriations to streamline participation agreements (e.g., pay-for-performance contracts or bonding instruments).

**Recovering for Resilience.** Congress should ensure post-fire recovery efforts promote resilient landscapes by:

- Authorizing a new competitive grant program to support seed collection, nursery infrastructure, and workforce among state, private, Tribal Nation, and land grant university partners to augment federal infrastructure investments made through proceeds from the National Seed Strategy and the Reforestation Trust Fund.
- Creating additional Tribal, state, and private forestry funding for post-fire reforestation and revegetation project implementation and monitoring programs.
- Authorizing and funding new authorities for relevant U.S. Department of the Interior bureaus to create similar capacities to the Reforestation Trust Fund capabilities.



Scan to access the TNC-Aspen Institute  
Wildfire Resilience Policy Roadmap