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Opening Statement of Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney Hearing on “Fighting Fire with Fire: Evaluating the Role of Forest Management in Reducing Catastrophic Wildfires” March 16, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership on this issue and for holding this important and timely hearing this morning.

As our country experiences increasingly frequent and severe wildfires and other natural disasters, the climate crisis has never been more dire.

A United Nations report issued last month detailed how climate change and poor land-use decisions will make wildfires more frequent and intense. All seasons will be fire season, and extreme fires will be more common, increasing by up to 30% by 2050, and by up to 50% by the end of the century.

The UN report called on all nations, including the United States, to change how we think of wildfires.

Our emergency service workers and firefighters on the frontlines are crucial to our response, and they need more support.

But in addition to fire suppression, we need to prioritize fire mitigation.

We have a responsibility to invest more in fire risk reduction, to work with local and indigenous communities who know the land, and to strengthen our global commitment to fight climate change.

That’s why I am grateful that today’s witnesses are joining us to explain what Congress, the Forest Service, and vulnerable communities can do if we work together.

First, we must act to address climate change. The United Nations has found that nations’ current climate pledges fall far too short of what is necessary to avert catastrophe.

If current trends continue, global warming will likely exceed 1.5 degrees before the middle of the century, a point at which scientists say our planet will suffer irreversible damage.

To avert this disaster, we need to immediately cut fossil fuel emissions by three to four percent each year and rapidly transition to net-zero carbon emissions.

Second, we also need to protect our forests, which absorb carbon emissions out of the air and lock them in trees and soil.

Our forests are precious ecosystems that support all kinds of diverse plant and animal life. They also provide essential natural resources from food to medicine.

Forests also support the lives and livelihoods of local communities.

Despite their clear benefits and natural beauty, our forests are under attack.

Whether it's due to climate change or the greed of the timber industry, we continue to lose our forests, along with the animals and plants that live in them.

The timber industry would like us to see forests as factories manufacturing the wood products they sell. They want us to believe that all the challenges we face with wildfires will be solved if we clear cut large trees for timber.

They want us to believe that forests thick with trees fuel bigger, more destructive blazes. But that is just not true.

That's why I introduced H.R. 1755, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, or NREPA.

NREPA is the kind of sweeping, systemic solution our nation needs to preserve pristine lands and benefit our environment.

My bill would designate approximately 23 million acres of wild lands in the continental northwest as wilderness. It would also designate approximately 1,800 miles of rivers and streams as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

This legislation would bring us significantly closer to President Biden's goal of protecting 30% of our lands and waters by 2030.

My bill would also help us meet the goals of the Paris Agreement by preserving large swaths of forest that help cancel out our nation's carbon pollution emissions.

And it will allow generations of Americans—including our children and grandchildren—to continue to enjoy these pristine wild places.

I want to thank Forest Service Chief Randy Moore and each of our other witnesses for their testimony today. I am particularly grateful that my friend Carole King is with us today.

Carole has been a champion for our public lands and for the struggle to preserve them for future generations. I am very thankful for her leadership in advocating for the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. Together, we will pass the bill and help our country meet its goals of protecting our shared lands and waters and combatting climate change.

I look forward to this hearing and the important topics we will cover. Thank you, Chairman Khanna for holding this hearing.

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