



January 8, 2026

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The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and
Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Val Hoyle
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and
Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle:

The Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) appreciates the Subcommittee's leadership in convening the oversight hearing entitled "Fix Our Forests for Affordable and Reliable Water and Power Supplies." TCIA supports the Fix Our Forests Act (H.R. 471) and its goal of expanding and accelerating wildfire-mitigation activities on federal lands. Because H.R. 471 amends Section 512 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to expand vegetation management authorities within and along utility rights-of-way, including hazard-tree removal, TCIA encourages continued attention to ensuring that implementing language is sufficiently clear to support consistent on-the-ground best practices that avoid uncertainty and associated liability for utility vegetation management (UVM) contractors. Specifically, TCIA urges you to add clarifying language to the bill that would establish a clear, minimum federal standard of care for pre-inspection of hazard trees and confirm that contractors are not treated as "owners" or "operators" for purposes of legal responsibility under Section 512.

TCIA represents approximately 1,400 businesses nationwide that engage in commercial tree care, providing services to residential communities, state and local governments, commercial businesses, and utilities. Our members play a vital role in wildfire prevention by identifying and mitigating hazardous vegetation near utility infrastructure, maintaining rights-of-way, and creating defensible spaces that reduce the likelihood of ignition.

Utility vegetation management contractors perform most of the vegetation management work needed to reduce ignition risk along powerlines and protect transmission corridors. However, a lack of clear standards, which has triggered shrinking insurance availability, rising premiums, and persistent legal uncertainty, are making it increasingly difficult for qualified companies to operate in high-risk wildfire areas. As a result, many contractors are declining wildfire-mitigation work in those areas or withdrawing from projects where exposure cannot be reasonably insured. Contractors are frequently drawn into wildfire litigation even where fault is unclear or absent, largely because they performed work onsite, in the absence of clear legal standards regarding responsibility and reasonable pre-inspection practices. Without greater legal clarity and access to affordable insurance, utilities' ability to carry out timely and effective right-of-way vegetation management is undermined—constraining the very activities needed to reduce transmission disruptions, power shutoffs, and emergency curtailments during wildfire season.

The Fix Our Forests Act appropriately seeks to streamline environmental review and accelerate forest-management projects, including vegetation removal along utility

corridors, to reduce wildfire risk and support reliable power delivery. For these reforms to succeed in practice and be deployed at the scale and pace FOFA envisions, statutory frameworks must clearly define a workable minimum standard of care for pre-inspection activities and distinguish the responsibilities of permit holders from those of contractors executing approved vegetation-management plans. Greater clarity would help reduce insurance-related barriers, support a stable UVM workforce, and ensure that right-of-way vegetation management can be performed safely and consistently across jurisdictions to protect transmission infrastructure and downstream water and power supplies.

TCIA appreciates the Subcommittee's leadership in addressing these critical issues and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate on solutions that strengthen the Fix Our Forests Act's objectives while ensuring effective, on-the-ground implementation. We look forward to working with Congress to advance wildfire resilience and protect critical infrastructure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a stylized "W".

David White, CAE
President & CEO, TCIA