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June 4, 2026

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
Chair
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Joe Neguse
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse:

On behalf of the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), I write to thank you for holding your oversight hearing "The State of Our Nation's Federal Forests and Outlook for the 2026 Wildfire Year." As the nation prepares for what may be a historic wildfire year, the conditions facing federal forests underscore the need for active management, including along the utility rights-of-way that cross federal lands. TCIA's members perform the majority of the vegetation management that reduces ignition risk in these areas, and TCIA supports the Fix Our Forests Act as an important tool to expand and accelerate that work. Because the Act would broaden vegetation management authorities under Section 512 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, including hazard-tree removal, TCIA urges Congress, as the Act advances, to add clarifying language 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.

However, a lack of clear standards, which has triggered shrinking insurance availability, rising premiums, and persistent legal uncertainty, is making it increasingly difficult for qualified utility vegetation management (UVM) 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.

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 more active management in utility rights-of-way. For these reforms to succeed in practice and be deployed at the scale and pace the Act envisions, the statute should provide contractors, utilities, and insurers a workable baseline — defining a minimum standard of care for pre-inspection and distinguishing 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.

As this Subcommittee examines the state of our federal forests and the outlook for the 2026 wildfire year, TCIA appreciates your leadership 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 by supporting more active vegetation management in utility rights-of-way and providing the clarity needed for qualified contractors to perform this work safely and effectively.

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