



# National Association of Conservation Districts

September 15, 2020

The Honorable Mike Lee  
Chairman – Subcommittee on  
Public Lands, Forests, and Mining  
Energy & Natural Resources Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member – Subcommittee on  
Public Lands, Forests, and Mining  
Energy & Natural Resources Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Legislative Hearing and Support for S. 4331  
Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020

Dear Chairman Lee and Ranking Member Wyden,

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's 3,000 locally-led conservation districts, working with millions of landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private and public lands. Established under state law, conservation districts share a single mission: to work cooperatively with federal, state and other local resource management agencies and private sector interest groups to provide technical, financial and other assistance to help landowners and operators apply conservation to the landscape.

The 2020 wildfire season has already inflicted severe economic, health and natural resource challenges across the country. Over 2.5 million acres have burned in California alone, more than any previous year on record. Additionally, over 3,700 structures have been destroyed as a result of the 28 major wildfires in the state. These statistics only cover one state, but communities across the West, including those in Oregon, Washington and Montana, have also been devastated by wildfires this year, and residents in these areas are currently being impacted by unhealthy smoke levels and lost property. While this season has been tragic, we can learn from these disasters by equipping natural resource managers with common sense tools that allow them to make the best local decisions for managing the landscape to prevent future wildfires. S. 4331, *Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020*, provides a path for stronger forestry management, healthier forests, and protection for communities threatened by wildfire, and NACD commends the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining for holding a hearing on this important legislation.

To meet the needs of each diverse landscape, resource managers rely on assorted toolboxes that allow them to best match the ecological aspect of the landscape with the management tactic used. Many of these methods are tried and true, but land managers do not currently have access to this full toolbox of management activities. Targeted grazing and prescribed fire have been proven to reduce hazardous fuel loads. A recently released study found that the 1.8 million beef cattle grazing on California's rangelands have notably reduced fuel loads on the landscape. On average, the study found that cattle grazing reduced the fuel load by 596 pounds per acre.<sup>1</sup> Responsibly sized categorical exclusions for fuel breaks, including, but not limited to livestock grazing and controlled burns, would drastically change on-the-ground activities, providing resource managers with a streamlined process for management projects to take place.

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<sup>1</sup> "Benefits of Cattle Grazing for Reducing Fire Fuels and Fire Hazard"  
<http://www.ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=43533>



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In 2015, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit case *Cottonwood Environmental Law Center vs. U.S. Forest Service* ruled that the U.S. Forest Service is to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on land management plans on potential impacts of endangered species each time new information is discovered. This process has crippled the U.S. Forest Service's ability to adequately manage our nation's forests. Additionally, it has led to an increase in red tape and hindered healthy forest and wildfire management in the process. Providing relief for the court's decision would provide the U.S. Forest Service with the ability to execute responsible on-the-ground management decisions, including those that help mitigate wildfire risk.

Soon, the next generation of natural resource managers will enter the profession and will be left to pick up where their predecessors left off. Fostering excitement in students early on, as well as providing those closer to entering the workforce with proper education and opportunities, ensures not only a strong workforce in this field but also a more vibrant future for our nation's forests and natural landscapes.

While communities have suffered due to catastrophic wildfires, natural resource managers stand ready to help mitigate this threat. The *Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020* helps address many of the challenges we are seeing on the ground today, and we look forward to this Committee's review of the legislation and urge you to ultimately move it for consideration by the full Senate.

Sincerely,

Tim Palmer  
President  
National Association of Conservation Districts