

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2022

The Honorable Randy Moore
Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Moore,

We write to inquire about the Forest Service's failed implementation of the Trestle Forest Health Project resulting in the destruction of Grizzly Flats, California, which was almost entirely wiped out by the 2021 Caldor Fire. In light of the recent investigation by CapRadio and the California Newsroom – and the billions of dollars that Congress has recently provided for hazardous fuels projects – we request that you provide us with a detailed briefing regarding the failed implementation of the Trestle Project, which experts have determined could have saved the town and spared its residents.

As highlighted in the investigation by CapRadio and the California Newsroom, the Forest Service warned the residents of Grizzly Flats decades ago that a blaze such as Caldor could destroy their town, which is surrounded on three sides by the Eldorado National Forest. Fire modeling from the Forest Service highlighted that a severe wildfire could engulf the town in as little as 24 hours. The Forest Service then spent nearly 10 years developing the Trestle Forest Health Project to protect Grizzly Flats by removing fuels on 15,000 acres of forest by 2020 to prevent a catastrophic fire using a combination of commercial thinning, hand thinning, and prescribed fire. However, the recent investigation found that the Forest Service neglected priority areas at the highest risk for fire, delayed the deadline for the project's completion, only completed 14% of the intended work, and only implemented the commercial thinning elements of the project that produce revenue for the forest unit.

On the other hand, the residents of Grizzly Flats took immediate action after being presented with the fire risk modeling. A volunteer Grizzly Flats Fire Safe Council was formed following that modeling and raised over \$2 million dollars through grants and grassroots funding to protect their community. Over the next 15 years, the council created fire breaks on the north, east, and west sides of the town – with the understanding that the Forest Service would complete its forest management and fire mitigation plan that included a fuel reduction project on the town's highly-combustible southern side, a promise that the Forest Service ultimately never fulfilled.

On August 17, 2021, the entire town of Grizzly Flats was destroyed by the Caldor Fire. The fire followed the southern path that had been predicted by the modeling and that would have been mitigated by full implementation of the Trestle Forest Health Project.

It is unacceptable that the town's proactive efforts and calls for aggressive fire mitigation assistance were met with inaction and delays from the Forest Service. Though we understand the administrative and environmental hurdles facing forest management projects – including staffing shortages, funding challenges, climate change, and endangered species concerns – the length of delays with regard to the Trestle Forest Health Project are particularly egregious and raise broader concerns.

In light of this example – and in anticipation of billions of dollars being spent on similar projects throughout California and the West in the coming years – we request a full explanation for the delays on the

Trestle Forest Health Project and a thorough overview of the uncompleted components of the project, the misplaced focus on the commercial thinning elements of the project, the lack of prescribed burns, and any administrative delays that ultimately resulted in the project being left incomplete. We also ask that you name any other communities in California for which the Forest Service has identified a high risk of catastrophic wildfire and is in the process of preparing a plan – or has prepared a plan but not yet fully implemented it.

We look forward to your response, and we hope to continue working together to increase the efficiency and funding for crucial wildfire mitigation projects to prevent further tragedies.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Conservation and Forestry



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress