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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R.

To fill vacancies for Forest Service recreation management and planning staff in National Forests and Grasslands, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. PANETTA introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To fill vacancies for Forest Service recreation management and planning staff in National Forests and Grasslands, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Save Our Forests Act
5 of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Between 2016 and 2020, on average, 89
2 percent of wildfires in the United States have been
3 human-caused.

4 (2) Human-caused fires tend to occur in or
5 near the wildland-urban interface (as defined in sec-
6 tion 101 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of
7 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6511)), where there is a greater
8 risk to people and communities and a higher cost to
9 suppress fires.

10 (3) The wildland-urban interface is the fastest-
11 growing land use type in the United States, posing
12 challenges for fire management and suppression.

13 (4) Over the last 10 years, an annual average
14 of 62,805 wildfires have impacted 7,516,855 acres.
15 In 2020, 58,950 wildfires impacted 10,122,336
16 acres nationwide. Approximately 70 percent of this
17 acreage impacted Federal land, of which 48 percent
18 (or 4,800,000 acres) was on National Forest System
19 land.

20 (5) Additionally, visitation at National Forests
21 has increased, while staffing has declined. Notably,
22 in fiscal year 2020, the Forest Service estimated
23 168.2 million National Forest recreation visits, an
24 increase of over 18.2 million recreation visits from
25 2019, which amounts to a 12.1 percent increase.

1 (6) The Forest Service continues to suffer from
2 chronic staffing shortages, with several National
3 Forests and Grasslands struggling to maintain their
4 acreage with insufficient recreation management and
5 planning staff.

6 **SEC. 3. FILLING FOREST SERVICE RECREATION MANAGE-**
7 **MENT STAFF VACANCIES.**

8 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary of Agriculture, act-
9 ing through the Chief of the Forest Service, shall fill va-
10 cancies in National Forests and Grasslands for Forest
11 Service recreation management and planning staff, includ-
12 ing recreation technicians, recreation officers, and natural
13 resource managers.

14 (b) **PRIORITY.**—In seeking to fill vacancies under
15 subsection (a), the Secretary shall prioritize filling vacan-
16 cies in National Forests and Grasslands that—

17 (1) are at high or very high risk of wildfires;
18 and

19 (2) are located in or near the wildland-urban
20 interface.

21 (c) **TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION AS A FOREST**
22 **PROTECTION OFFICER.**—The Secretary may provide the
23 opportunity for any individual who fills a vacancy pursu-
24 ant to subsection (a) to receive training and certification
25 as a Forest Protection Officer.

1 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

2 (1) IN GENERAL.—In addition to other funds
3 that may be available to the Forest Service for the
4 purposes specified in this section, there is authorized
5 to be appropriated to carry out this section
6 \$46,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2022 and 2023.

7 (2) ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.—Of the
8 amounts available under paragraph (1) for each fis-
9 cal year, not more than 3 percent may be used for
10 administrative expenses incurred in carrying out this
11 section.