



COMMITTEE ON  
**ENERGY & COMMERCE**  
**DEMOCRATS**  
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 4, 2017

**CONTACT**

[CJ Young](#) — (202) 225-5735

## **Pallone Opening Remarks at Hearing on Wildfires**

**Washington, D.C.** – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Environment hearing titled, “Air Quality Impacts of Wildfires: Perspectives of Key Stakeholders:”*

Thank you for calling this important hearing. This year has been a terrible year for natural disasters. Record numbers of wildfires and catastrophic hurricanes have claimed lives and property across the country and in the U.S. territories. The human and financial costs of these events are extremely high and still rising. Recovery takes years, and some places never fully recover.

Climate change is having the effects that were anticipated by the scientific community, and yet the Trump Administration and Congressional Republicans continue to stick their heads in the sand. They do so at all of our peril. It is long past time for us to deal with the realities and risks we face due to the change in climate. We need to do a much better job of protecting communities by making them more resistant and resilient to natural disasters. We need to slow the pace of climate change. And, we need to adapt to the changes that we are facing. All of this is critical, and it simply cannot be done until Washington Republicans actually acknowledge that it is indeed a problem. One would hope that the hurricanes and fires of the recent months have served as a wake-up call for some of my Republican colleagues – we’ll see.

Turning to wildfires, I expect all of our witnesses today will point out that fire is and always has been part of the life cycle of forests. In fact, many ecosystems are well-adapted to fire. Some systems require periodic burning to remain healthy to regenerate. In fact, some of the problems we are experiencing today are the unfortunate result of having suppressed fires in these systems for too long. But, severe drought, high seasonal temperatures, expansion of native pest species, and the introduction of invasive species also play a role. Climate change, coupled with the build-up of brush, small trees and other forest fuels, has resulted in more frequent fires that burn hotter, over more extensive areas.

The Forest Service recently announced that the fire-fighting costs for this season have exceeded \$2 billion, and we haven’t yet reached the end of the fire season. The costs for

---

fire-fighting have been climbing and, if we do not change our management of these systems and invest more in preventative management, we can expect the costs to continue to grow.

But, proper management does not mean simply increasing timber harvests. Logging does not prevent wildfires or minimize the impact when fires start.

We need comprehensive ecosystem management that includes prescribed fire, selective harvesting, and reforestation. And, we need greater public education, involvement and participation -- especially by communities living near and around forests -- to help them reduce their fire risks.

This hearing will highlight the air quality problems associated with wildfires. Smoke from those fires contains particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and other harmful gases. It is a serious health hazard, particularly for those who suffer from asthma and other respiratory diseases. And, it is a significant threat for the firefighters who respond and spend weeks fighting to control and put out the blazes. The intense smoke also adversely affects visibility across large areas, impacting transportation, recreation, and tourism. Longer, more intense fire seasons expose many people in these areas to months of poor air quality.

Forests are a great resource. They provide tremendous economic and ecological benefits. They protect water quality, provide raw materials, and they support numerous recreation and economic activities. They are home to a diverse array of plants and animals. And, these systems are among the most effective at absorbing and storing the excess carbon we continue to pump into the atmosphere.

Managed properly, they will continue to provide a full array of benefits. But, we must acknowledge and respond to the threat that climate change presents to these systems and the communities that live near them.

We have an excellent panel of witnesses here this morning. I look forward to the testimony and hearing from them how we can better protect our communities and our forests.

Thank you, I yield back.

###