

OPENING STATEMENT

It is with great urgency and concern that we hold this hearing today. The mountain pine beetle, an insect no bigger than a grain of rice, has killed millions of acres of pine trees across the West and continues to spread unabated. The death of those trees threatens the very existence of Western communities and their residents.

While presently most of the mountain pine beetle kill areas are found in Colorado and Wyoming, we should not make the mistake of thinking that the beetle won't continue to spread, infesting and killing massive numbers of trees in other states throughout the entire West.

Even if the mountain pine beetle doesn't kill trees in other areas, something else will. The United States Geological Survey published a report in January of this year showing evidence that the rate of the death of trees in Western U.S. forests has more than doubled in the last two decades. The cause of this death has been linked to higher temperatures and scarce water, both of which are the result of climate change.

Aside from higher temperatures and less water, climate change is conducive to outbreaks of pests like the mountain pine beetle and other diseases. The entire West needs to be on notice: **this epidemic is one of many events that we can expect in the coming decades that will cause**

substantial deaths of trees in Western U.S. forests. The deaths of those trees threaten the safety of communities due to fires. The deaths of those trees threaten our watersheds, our power grid, and other vital infrastructure. The deaths of those trees threaten the economic vitality of the entire region.

We will hear today from witnesses that the mountain pine beetle cannot be stopped. We will hear that the damage is so widespread that a fire is inevitable. While I accept those facts, I want to remind everyone in this room that the horrible situation we find ourselves in now will continue to repeat itself over time and throughout our entire country.

We need to use this experience with the mountain pine beetle to develop comprehensive strategies to protect Western communities from future mass tree deaths in our forests. We need to learn lessons about prevention of future outbreaks of diseases and pests. We need to have a clear plan in place BEFORE outbreaks occur to know how to best manage them and mitigate the damage. We must be ready to protect our Western communities and the livelihoods of each and every person in the West.

I look forward to learning today about how we protect the Western way of life in the face of this deadly beetle, and the lessons we can learn from this to help us combat the widespread death of other trees in the future.

With that said, I am pleased to now yield to my friend and colleague, Ranking Member Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, for her opening statement.