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**Before the
HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND MANAGEMENT**

**Regarding
“TEXAS WILDFIRE REVIEW: DID BUREAUCRACY PREVENT A TIMELY
RESPONSE?”**

OCTOBER 17, 2011

Chairman McCaul and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Forest Service’s role in the Federal response to wildfires in Texas. The State has been experiencing unprecedented fire behavior this fire season due to prolonged drought combined with dry, windy conditions. Between January 1 and October 4, 2011, over 3,500 fires have burned nearly 3 million acres in Texas. Drought is forecast to persist or worsen across the south and southwest parts of the nation for the near future.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Forest Service manages 155 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands in 44 States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Because of these management responsibilities, the wildland fire organization within the Forest Service is the largest in the United States. We have been managing wildland fire for more than 100 years. We respond to thousands of wildfires and conduct thousands of controlled burns per year.

Because wildland fire knows no boundaries, teamwork is essential in managing a coordinated response. Local, State, Tribal and Federal firefighters all work together in partnership. We all take seriously our role in protecting people, property and valuable natural resources from wildland fire. Pooling our strengths and resources helps us to maintain our operational excellence and to continually improve the safety and effectiveness of fire management.

The Forest Service is proud to be a part of this unique partnership. Congress and the President have given the Forest Service authorities that have allowed us to develop a seamless wildland fire response network across the United States. We developed the incident management system, which has evolved and been adopted across the United States for the management of all emergencies, including fire. We respond to requests from partners to come and assist by providing resources to State or local governments through cooperative agreements.

In preparing for the 2011 fire season, the Forest Service (along with the Department of the Interior) worked along with the States and Tribes to ensure we had adequate national firefighting

resources prepared and positioned. The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC), located at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, oversees coordinated wildland firefighting responses throughout the nation. When fire resources in one geographic area are in short supply, the NICC prioritizes, allocates, and, if necessary, re-allocates resources. Prioritization ensures firefighting forces are positioned where they are needed most. Fire resources such as personnel, equipment, aircraft, vehicles, and supplies are dispatched and tracked through an integrated national system also developed by the Forest Service.

While the Forest Service does have direct protection responsibility for 675,000 acres of National Forest System land and grasslands in Texas, we are a relatively small player in the State. Of the total acreage burned during this fire season, 174 fires have burned 3,651 acres of the National Forest System land in Texas; 165 fires have burned 13,823 acres of land managed by the Department of the Interior in Texas; however, 3,194 fires have burned 2,876,126 acres of State and private land. We are here because our friends in the Texas Forest Service (TFS) asked us to help. We are pleased to be able to do so.

We have a long and successful partnership with our friends in the TFS. We actively assisted TFS with wildfire and support for events in the past, most recently Hurricane Ike in 2008 and the wildfires in West Texas in 2008 and 2009. We have also taken many actions over the last few months of this year to assist TFS with fire suppression efforts on State and private lands. To date we have provided approximately 9,908 fire resources. Specifically, we sent 92 firefighting crews, as well as support staff and skilled members of interagency incident management teams; a variety of aircraft – 104 helicopters, 87 airtankers, 98 other aircraft; 387 firefighting engines; 71 dozers; and 140 water tenders.

Additionally, TFS has established cooperative forest management programs, which receive funding from Forest Service, primarily through authorities in the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (Act). This Act provides several cooperative grant programs to the State, such as:

- State Fire Assistance
- Volunteer Fire Assistance
- Federal Excess Personal Property Program
- Firefighter Property
- Forest Stewardship
- Forest Health
- Urban and Community Forestry

Forest Service uses its State Fire Assistance authority to provide funds to support TFS's fire management capacity. The Forest Service has also provided dozens of wildfire intelligence specialists to TFS. These resources provide fire weather forecasts, predict fire behavior, analyze wildland fuel conditions, study National Fire Danger Rating indices and components and model wildfire growth and potential.

The Texas Forest Service is one of the most highly skilled and experienced wildland firefighting agencies in the United States. The Forest Service will continue to be a strong partner and assist

with fire suppression efforts on State and private lands as the State faces challenging wildfire conditions in the months ahead.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.