

CONGRESSWOMAN YOUNG KIM
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2023 – 10:15-11:15 AM ET
LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 1324

Thank you, Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Grijalva, for this opportunity to speak today before the Committee.

I represent California's 40th District which includes parts of Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties in Southern California. My district also includes unincorporated areas spanning several canyon communities and the Cleveland National Forest's Trabuco District.

I want to take the opportunity to talk about trail maintenance challenges impacting public lands in my district and a bill I've worked on with district stakeholders and first responders to improve public-private coordination on wildfire technology modernization.

Routine trail maintenance is essential for post-fire and non-fire related risk mitigation efforts. Burned areas are subject to soil erosion, flooding, and destructive debris flows that endanger nearby homes and civilian lives.

In the Cleveland National Forest's Trabuco District, the 2018 Holy Jim Fire forced shutdowns across several popular trails, and these trails remain closed due to persistent erosion and infrastructure-related concerns.

According to the Trabuco District Forest Service rangers, there are only three non-fire Forest Service personnel in the field and seven to eight trail volunteers that actively manage trails across 138,971 acres of the Trabuco area.

National Forests with the most urgent trail and infrastructure maintenance needs must have adequate funding for staffing and resources. While Federal land management agencies have been appropriated significant amounts of funding these past few years, there is not much transparency on how funding for these maintenance activities is being prioritized and allocated. This is a key concern for my constituents in the Orange County Canyon Communities.

I was pleased to see language I submitted regarding trail maintenance included in the FY24 Interior Appropriations Bill Report. It directs the Forest Service to prioritize funding for trails that have been damaged or shut down by wildfires in the last

five years that have high levels of foot traffic regularly exceeding daily carrying capacity.

I thank the Chairman and his staff for working with me on this language and continuing to collaborate on draft legislation to expedite trail and campground restoration in the National Forest System.

I also want to bring up another one of my priorities regarding wildfire technology. Across Federal land management agencies, there is no streamlined process for assessing and deploying innovative wildfire technologies. Meanwhile, private entities are developing innovative technologies to fight wildfires, but they often lack the means to test their technologies at-scale, in real time.

In June, I introduced H.R. 4235, the Wildfire Technology Demonstration, Evaluation, Modernization, and Optimization, or Wildfire Tech DEMO Act. It directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to create a 4-year pilot program allowing private entities developing wildfire technologies to partner with Federal land management agencies and test their technologies alongside hazardous fuels mitigation activities and training.

I had the opportunity to meet with some of the groups developing these next-generation technologies. These include AI-enabled cameras and thermal cameras to track wildfires, virtual reality simulations for firefighting training, and upgraded firefighting aircraft.

This bill is a win-win for private entities looking to test their equipment at-scale and federal land management agencies working to deploy the best technologies to help first responders address wildfires and keep communities safe.

I was very excited to hear that it will be considered in a hearing this month. Southern California is at the forefront of wildfire technology innovation, and I am thrilled that Air and Wildland Division Chief, Jim Topoleski, from San Bernardino County Fire Protection District will be testifying at this hearing.

Thank you to the Chairman and to your staff in making sure this important legislation is heard and for the opportunity to speak before you today on my priorities. I look forward to the good work that will continue to come out of this Committee and appreciate our partnership. Thank you.