Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 6, 2026

Chairman Tom Cole
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We write today to express our concern about a pressing issue affecting the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) and disaster recovery efforts nationwide.

Hurricane Helene struck the eastern United States on September 26, 2024, causing severe damage across multiple states. While the impacts in the Southeast were especially visible, forestland owners across the country have since faced mounting recovery needs from hurricanes, wildfires, floods, tornadoes, and other qualifying disaster events. EFRP is the only federal program designed to help private forest owners clear debris, prepare sites, and replant after disasters of this scale.

States across the country, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, South Dakota, and others, have significant approved but unmet restoration needs. In several states, only a small share of obligated funding has been disbursed, and others have received no outlays at all, despite documented damage and approved agreements. These figures underscore the widespread demand for forest restoration support following recent disasters, far beyond any one state or storm.

Under EFRP, landowners must pay upfront for debris removal, site preparation, and replanting, with reimbursement only after work is completed. Many undertook these efforts based on approved agreements, often taking out operating loans with the expectation that EFRP would offset a portion of these costs. Without additional funds, landowners in multiple states who were approved for assistance are facing uncertainty as to whether they will receive the reimbursements they were relying on to complete recovery work.

The length of the recovery timeline is not due to delays on the part of landowners. Limited contractor capacity, seedling shortages, regional labor constraints, and the sheer scale of storm and wildfire damage have meant that cleanup and reforestation often require multiple seasons. Now, as landowners complete their work, previously obligated reimbursements are no longer available.

With EFRP serving as the primary federal mechanism for forest debris removal and reforestation, the exhaustion of funding places forest owners nationwide at risk. State programs, where they exist, generally cover timber value loss only and do not support debris removal or replanting. Yet these steps are essential to reducing wildfire risk, preventing pest outbreaks, protecting watersheds, and restoring long-term forest health.

We respectfully ask the Committee to examine options to ensure additional funding for landowners relying on EFRP to complete disaster recovery efforts, both for Hurricane Helene and for other federally recognized natural disasters. This support is necessary to uphold commitments made under approved agreements and to bring recovery efforts to a timely conclusion for communities across the country. We stand ready to assist in this effort.

We appreciate the Committee's longstanding support for forestry disaster recovery and welcome the opportunity to provide further details, including examples from affected landowners in multiple states.

Sincerely,

Austin Scott
Member of Congress

Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress

Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress

Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

Rick W. Allen
Member of Congress

Randy Fine
Member of Congress

Barry Loudermilk
Member of Congress

Val Hoyle
Member of Congress

Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress

Jack Bergman
Member of Congress

Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress

Donald G. Davis
Member of Congress

CC: Chairman Andy Harris
Ranking Member Sanford Bishop
Chairman Glenn “GT” Thompson
Ranking Member Angie Craig