To: Interested Parties
From: Working Forests Initiative
Subject: Wildfire Mitigation: Strategy and Values in Action

If you care about the planet, it's impossible to ignore wildfires like the Palisades and Eaton fires of January 2025, or the Freeman Fire in Pinal County, Arizona of July 2024. More recently, the Caldor Ridge Fire in Northern California (July 2025) and the devastating Alberta–British Columbia fires of August 2025 underscore that this is not a distant problem — it's happening now across North America. They are becoming more frequent, intense, and devastating, posing a growing threat to communities, ecosystems, and economies. With record-breaking heat waves, drought stress, and dry lightning storms driving what many scientists are calling the worst wildfire season in recent memory, it's important for the public to understand why these fires are becoming more severe, what tools and techniques are best used to combat them, and how the forestry industry handles the majority of wildfire risk reduction in this country.

The forestry industry plays a pivotal role in fighting wildfires, using tools and techniques like prescribed burns and thinning to effectively mitigate wildfire danger. Working Forests Initiative (WFI), a coalition of the leading forest products companies committed to educating the public about the sustainability of working forests, is dedicated to proactive solutions to keep our forests—and communities—safe for generations to come.

If you're interested in learning more about sustainable forest management and WFI's role in mitigating wildfire risk, please don't hesitate to reach out: wfi-team@bpigroup.com.

Who We Are
Our companies are dedicated to responsible forestry and promoting sustainable practices that protect forests for future generations, which is why we do more than any other industry to suppress and put out wildfires. And we are guided by one central principle: keep the forest growing. So, we plant more than we harvest and we look out for the health of the entire ecosystem. That's our north star, and why we're so committed to planting and replanting generations of trees and healthy forests.

We are in the business of growing trees; we cannot afford to let these trees and resources be destroyed by destructive fires. But our sense of commitment goes further than that – the forestry community also takes its responsibility as stewards of the land and members of the local communities seriously. We want to protect the forests for recreational use, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

Foresters are at the frontlines of wildfire prevention and management. Through active forest management, we reduce overgrown vegetation, manage underbrush, and conduct controlled burns to minimize the risk of large, destructive fires. These efforts not only protect forests but also help them recover and thrive after fires occur.

The Importance of Sustainable Forest Management
Sustainable forest management is critical for the future of our nation's forests. Healthy, managed forests support biodiversity while protecting forestland from disease, insect infestations, invasive species, and wildfires. Through active management practices we can simulate the natural forest cycle while creating plant fiber for everyday items families need. When we harvest trees, conduct prescribed burns, and replant, we can create more diversity in a working forest and reduce the fuel loads that can feed destructive wildfires.

We achieve this through techniques like:

- **Thinning:** The strategic removal of excess trees, shrubs, and undergrowth to reduce fuel loads and improve forest health, lowering the risk of severe wildfires.
- **Controlled Burns:** Pre-planned, regulated burns used to clear flammable materials and return nutrients to the soil, reducing the potential for destructive wildfires.
- **Forest Restoration:** Replanting and managing forests to enhance biodiversity, resilience, and long-term sustainability.
- **Mimicking Natural Patterns:** Utilizing planting cycles that replicate nature's processes, maintaining balanced ecosystems and reducing fire risks.

We manage working forests for its utmost health, routinely participating in these practices to reduce the available fuel for a wildfire. And they work – a study found that prescribed burns and strategic thinning in Tahoe National Forest could significantly reduce the risk of wildfire to over 80,000 homes.

And in 2018, a fire started in Summit County, Colorado, but the previous reduction of hazardous fuels and pre-placed fuel breaks helped control and limit the spread of the fire. The multi-year wildfire mitigation efforts were estimated to cost around $1 million, but during the Buffalo Fire, those efforts prevented the destruction of $1 billion in infrastructure. More recently, in 2025, proactive thinning and fuel management projects in Oregon's Deschutes National Forest limited the spread of the Painted Hills Fire, protecting nearby towns during one of the hottest, driest summers on record.

Forestry operates through an interconnected cycle—trees are harvested sustainably, replanted, and managed to mirror natural processes. By controlling tree density and managing brush, we reduce the conditions that make wildfires more extreme. This year's record-breaking summer heat and widespread drought highlight how essential these practices are for keeping forests resilient under increasingly volatile conditions. Simply put, our planting strategy puts the health of trees at the forefront. This approach fosters healthier forests, better equipped to withstand and recover from fire events.

The Rise of Urban Fires and Importance of Home Hardening

Urban fires—defined as wildfires in suburban and urban communities—are a growing threat, in part due to housing developments encroaching on fire-prone areas, among other reasons. The role of home hardening in mitigating urban fire risk is crucial. Home hardening involves using fire-resistant construction and creating defensible spaces around the home to reduce the likelihood of homes igniting in a wildfire.

Education on home hardening practices is essential for communities in wildfire-prone areas to improve resilience and safety and reducing wildfire risk and insurance costs.

Key home hardening strategies include:

- Class A fire-rated roofing: Proven to reduce the risk of ignition during a wildfire.
- Multi-pane or tempered glass windows: Helps prevent heat-related breakage, reducing the chances of embers igniting indoor materials.
- Ember-resistant vents: Reduces the likelihood of wind-driven embers entering homes and igniting structures.
- Defensible space creation: A defensible space around the home can dramatically improve a home's survival rate during a wildfire. Wildland urban interface codes and

standards utilize defensible space from 30', 50', and 100' based on the area's recognized hazard level.

Common Misconceptions

MYTH: For too long, misconceptions have clouded the public's understanding of how the forestry industry deals with wildfires, often portraying the industry as a primary cause of these fires due to logging practices, ignoring factors like climate change, poor land management, and the vast differences in managing public versus private lands. This couldn't be further from the truth – the forestry industry plays a vital role in fire prevention by maintaining healthier, less fire-prone ecosystems.

As managers of working forests, we use controlled or prescribed burns to stay ahead of wildfire risks by reducing undergrowth and fuel loads that feed destructive fires. These controlled burns are regulated, pre-planned, and help improve forest health by returning nutrients to the soil. In contrast, unmanaged public lands can become overgrown, increasing the risk of flammable brush and dead trees fueling wildfires.

MYTH: Another common misconception is that even-age management, where trees in a forest are of the same age, makes forests more susceptible to fire. In reality, even-age management doesn't inherently increase fire risk. It can actually make forests less susceptible to wildfires by promoting diversity in the forest structure. When combined with thinning and other practices, even-age management contributes to healthier, more resilient forests that are better equipped to withstand fires.

MYTH: Some critics say that planting in rotation creates "teenage" trees that are fuel for fires. Cutting small trees is helpful in reducing fuel loads, which is why we use a method known as "mechanical fuel treatments." A mechanical fuel treatment is the practice of cutting down small trees and brush and then cleaning out the tree debris using controlled burns. According to Maureen Kennedy, researcher and assistant professor at the University of Washington Tacoma, this is the best method to remove debris that can act as a fuel load, saying "If we can conduct mechanical treatments and controlled burns, and create a patchy landscape, then even with climate change, there's a chance to save the forest."

MYTH: While it is true that most fire ignitions occur on private lands, the designation of private lands applies to all private lands, not private working forests. Most fire ignitions are caused by people and people usually work and live on private property. However, public lands are more likely to experience damaging wildfires due to several factors, including size, fuel build-up, and limited resources for management. The difference between the public and private response to fires is stark – public lands are significantly larger and less managed, which is why they generally burn more. Unfortunately, for far too long, there's been insufficient public funding for firefighting efforts, making it more difficult for public agencies to access the tools they need. As forest managers, we take a much more hands on approach, and if a fire breaks out on private lands, we address it quickly.

MYTH: Some people incorrectly argue that management practices aimed at reducing forest fuels, like thinning, actually increase fire risk instead of reducing it. However, there is substantial evidence proving that forest fuel treatments, especially those involving fire—whether prescribed or managed—are effective. These treatments help moderate wildfire behavior, even during extreme weather conditions, by slowing down their spread, reducing fireline intensity, and minimizing severity and smoke production in treated areas. Fuel treatments are particularly

beneficial in ecosystems that have historically had limited fuel, as well as in high-severity systems that currently lack typical burned and recovered pathworks of forest and non-forest. (Safford *et al*. 2012; Stephens *et al*. 2012; Prichard and Kennedy 2014; Lydersen *et al*. 2017; Hessburg *et al*. 2019; Prichard *et al*. 2020; Jones *et al*. 2022; North *et al*. 2021)

MYTH: Some critics mistakenly argue that pre-fire fuels reduction is driven by timber harvesting rather than reducing fire risk. In reality, mechanical fuels reduction aims to preserve medium and large fire-tolerant trees, ensuring their survival for future fires. These treatments help remove accumulated woody material and fuel ladders that have built up due to fire exclusion, much of which has little economic value. Additionally, removing medium- or large-sized fire-intolerant trees that have grown during periods of fire suppression is crucial for enhancing the survival of fire-tolerant trees. (Agee and Skinner 2005; Schwilk *et al*. 2009; Stephens *et al*. 2009, 2020, 2021; Collins *et al*. 2014; Prichard *et al*. 2021; Hessburg *et al*. 2022)

MYTH: For far too long, misconceptions about how wildfires start and spread, and who is to blame, have gone unchecked. Many still believe that wildfires are solely natural disasters, fueled by forces beyond human control, like lightning strikes or extreme weather. However, the reality is much more complex. Human activity, including poor land management, deforestation, and climate change, plays a significant role in both the frequency and intensity of these fires, as does careless human actions.

By ignoring these factors, we can overlook crucial solutions like active forest management techniques that are proven to mitigate wildfire risks. We acknowledge that fighting wildfires at the scale we see today is a significant challenge, but through long-term fire mitigation strategies, we can reduce the risk of severe, catastrophic wildfires.

WFI is at the forefront of ensuring resilient, healthy forests for future generations, and we are eager to be a resource for those looking to understand the nuances of wildfire prevention, forest management, and our role in safeguarding forests. Please don’t hesitate to reach out.

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