

**Statement of P. Michael Freeman
Former Los Angeles County Fire Chief
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 113, the Angeles and San Bernardino National
Forests Protection Act**

October 25, 2011

Natural Resources Committee Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member Markey, Subcommittee Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and members of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit testimony on H.R. 113, the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests Protection Act.

My name is P. Michael Freeman and I am the former Fire Chief of Los Angeles County. I recently retired after 22 years of service as the Fire Chief and 47 total years of experience as a firefighter. As Fire Chief, I ran a fire department for a county with more than 9.8 million people and an incredibly diverse landscape, with everything from coastline to mountains and forests.

One of the many challenges I faced as Fire Chief was ensuring the safety of our firefighters, residents as well as the communities at the foothills of the Angeles National Forest during wildfire season. Multiple factors contribute to this difficult task including rough terrain, a close urban interface as well as unpredictable fire patterns. This is why it is vital that firefighters have the resources and flexibility needed to fight wildfires.

Preventing and containing wildfires is an issue that I have worked on with Congressman David Dreier for many years. Fighting wildfires in Los Angeles County can be incredibly dangerous and strenuous. In 2009, the Los Angeles County Fire Department, along with multiple other firefighters, battled the Station Fire. This fire ended up burning more than 160,000 acres and was the largest wildfire in the modern history of Los Angeles County. Tragically, it also took the lives of two firefighters, Fire Captain Ted Hall and Firefighter Specialist Arnie Quinones. In September, 2009, the House of Representatives passed a resolution honoring these two brave men. I deeply appreciate your support in recognizing Captain Hall and Specialist Quinones who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving Los Angeles County.

In the aftermath of the Station Fire, my colleagues and I had many meetings on the lessons learned from this fire. In addition, Congressman Dreier and I discussed ways to better protect firefighters and prevent large-scale forest fires from occurring. The fire management section included in H.R. 113 is the culmination of these conversations.

Although I am now retired, ensuring that current and future firefighters have the ability to properly carry out fire prevention and suppression activities remains extremely important to me. That is why it is my hope that the Committee will support the fire management language in H.R. 113. Thank you for your time and consideration.