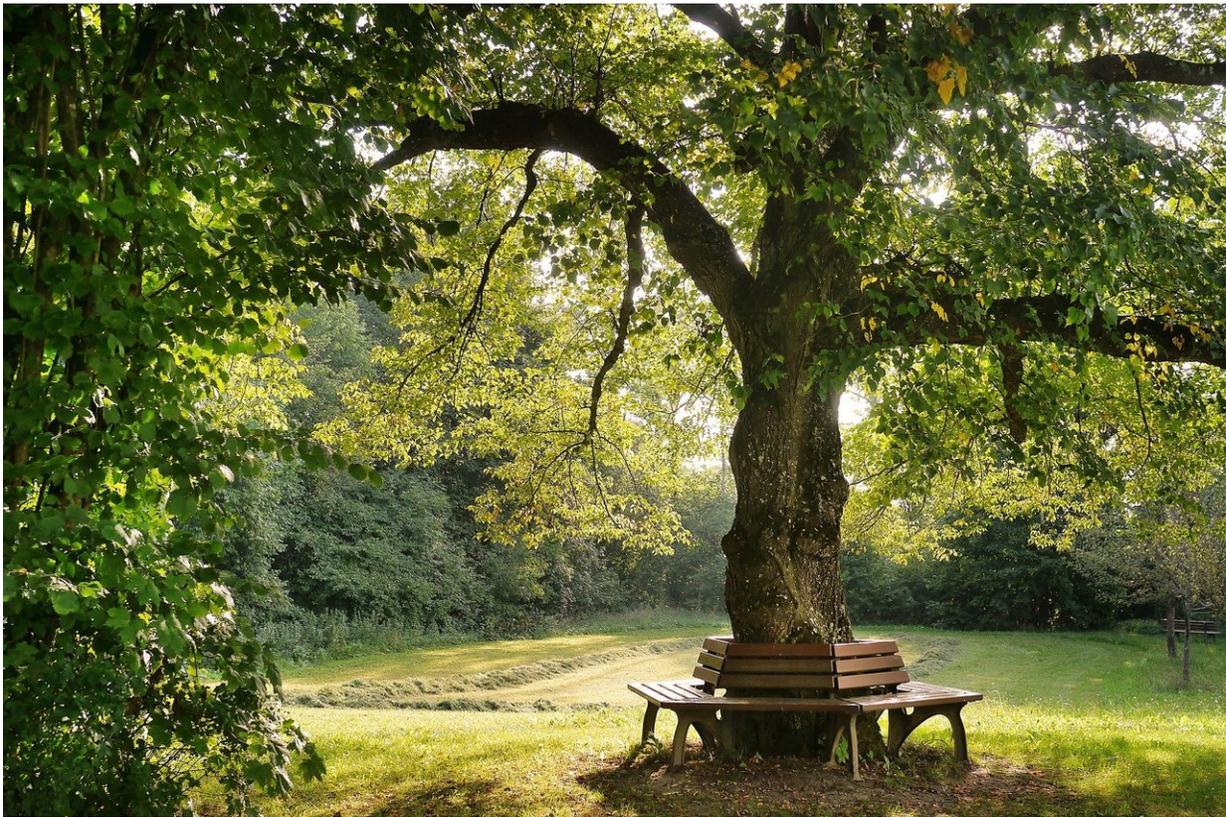


A trillion trees not enough to fix climate crisis, critics say

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A trillion trees is a lot, but would be woefully inadequate to address the global warming crisis, according to Democrats and climate scientists who said Republican backers of a tree-planting plan are using it to

distract attention from the need to phase out fossil fuel use.

The tree-planting [bill](#)—which calls for the U.S. to support a global effort to plant 1 trillion [trees](#)—got a hearing at the House Natural Resources Committee on Wednesday, where sponsor Bruce Westerman, R-Ark., said it offers the most "pragmatic, proactive and logical" approach to reducing carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere.

The legislation mirrors President Donald Trump's decision to join a global initiative driven by the United Nations.

"There's nothing that can store carbon better and longer than wood," Westerman said.

But panel Democrats and some witnesses said that while they support growing more trees, they were concerned that the legislation would encourage logging under the guise of forest management in areas such as the Tongass National Forest in Alaska, and that it dodges more effective solutions.

On Tuesday, more than 95 environmental organizations wrote a letter to the committee urging it to reject the bill, which they consider a "gift" to the logging industry.

At the Wednesday hearing, Carla Staver, an associate professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Yale, said planting new trees alone isn't a viable solution and would only remove a small amount of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

"Our primary focus must be reducing our dependence on fossil fuels," Staver said. "The illusion that tree-planting is a silver-bullet solution to the climate crisis is a distraction from real action." Scientists continue to warn that countries need to drastically and quickly cut their [greenhouse](#)

[gas emissions](#) if they are to stave off the worst impacts of a hotter Earth.

Republicans have long rejected that scientific consensus. Even as polling shows greater demand for climate action among young Republican voters and others, GOP lawmakers and the Trump administration continue to oppose government interventions to require or encourage the reduction and elimination of carbon emissions, the primary culprit in global warming.

The GOP has offered the tree-planting bill as an alternative to federal regulations.

"I respectfully ask anyone to offer a better solution," said Westerman, who received his master's degree in forestry from Yale.

An exclusive focus on trees is narrow, Staver said; they take too long to grow and the major benefits of tree-planting will only accrue after 2030, a pace she said would be too slow.

"Isn't it worth starting now?" Westerman asked in response.

In the letter to House Natural Resources Committee, the group of environmental organizations took issue with several aspects of the bill, including incentives for more logging and its consideration of biomass energy from burning wood as carbon neutral.

"This deceptive bill is the worst kind of greenwashing and a complete distraction from urgently needed reductions in fossil fuel pollution," said Randi Spivak, public lands program director at the Center for Biological Diversity, which also signed the letter.

"If Westerman were truly serious about addressing the climate crisis, he'd work on a bill to slash fossil fuel emissions by half over the next 10

years and protect our forests."

At least one Republican pushed back on the tree bill, saying there's not enough federal land for new trees and that the forests in his state are overcrowded and have become bigger carbon dioxide emitters when they catch fire.

"It's not clear to me where we're going to fit more trees on the federal lands," Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., said. "The rest of the federal lands are mainly desert, can't support trees."

Chairman Raul M. Grijalva, D-Ariz., said he appreciates the tree-planting bill and welcomes Republicans' "new chapter" focusing on climate solutions rather than "climate denial," but like others, said more needs to be done.

"We all agree that nature-based solutions are critical to combat climate change, but we must not lose focus on what the science tells us we must do to stabilize (global) temperatures and avoid catastrophic impacts," Grijalva said.

"This will require hundreds of steps across all sectors of the economy, coordination across the entire federal government and legislation from almost every congressional committee," he said.

Another bill examined at the hearing, offered by Grijalva, would aim to put the country on the path to net-zero carbon emissions by 2040, partly by halting new fossil fuel leasing and production on public lands for a year while requiring agencies to meet emission-reduction targets.

His bill also would encourage renewable fuel production on public lands.

"All the trees won't stand a fighting chance if we don't cut our fossil fuel

emissions," Grijalva said.

Fellow Arizona lawmaker Paul Gosar, a Republican, said that banning exploration on public lands wouldn't reduce carbon emissions, but instead allow U.S. competitors such as Russia and Saudi Arabia to take a greater market share of fossil fuel production.

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