

September 28, 2023

The Honorable Morgan Griffith
Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations
Committee on Energy & Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kathy Castor
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations
Committee on Energy & Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Griffith and Ranking Member Castor:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record regarding today's hearing, "Investigating the Role of Electric Infrastructure in the Catastrophic Maui Fire." As this Subcommittee recognizes, increasingly extreme weather events, including catastrophic wildfires, are having devastating consequences and are challenging the ability of electric companies to provide reliable and affordable electricity to the customers and communities they serve.

While today's hearing is focused on the tragic events on Maui, EEI and our member electric companies across the country agree that wildfires are not just a Maui problem. The National Interagency Fire Center reported that more than 68,000 wildfires and more than 7.5 million acres burned across the country in 2022, the last full year for which data are available.¹ This includes fires on federal, state, and private lands. During this period, wildfires occurred in all 50 states and were not limited to any specific geographical area, with a notable increase in areas of the country not historically classified as high-fire risk areas.²

All indicia point to that fact that, due to a range of factors—many of which are beyond the control of electric companies, including extended periods of extreme heat and drought, poor forest health, and an increase of population in the wildland-urban interface—wildfires and catastrophic wildfires will continue to be a challenge facing our nation and the world.³

EEI's member companies are committed to developing solutions to reduce the incidence of fires and to mitigate their impacts if they do occur. They are—and have been—making proactive investments in the adaptation, hardening, and resilience of the energy grid.⁴ Through a risk-based approach, electric companies are hardening their infrastructure, deploying new technologies, increasing their situational

¹ National Interagency Fire Center, *National Interagency Coordination Center Wildland Fire Summary and Statistics Annual Report* (2022), https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NICC/2-Predictive%20Services/Intelligence/Annual%20Reports/2022/annual_report.2.pdf.

² *Id.*

³ United Nations Environment Programme, *Spreading Like Wildfire: The Rising Threat of Extraordinary Landscape Fires* (2022), file:///C:/Users/efisher/Downloads/wildfire_RRA.pdf.

⁴ Edison Electric Institute, *EEI Industry Capital Expenditures* (July, 2023), https://www.eei.org/-/media/Project/EEI/Documents/Issues-and-Policy/Finance-And-Tax/bar_cap_ex.pdf.

awareness, implementing operational changes, and enhancing their wildfire response capabilities. In every state, electric companies are working with policymakers, regulators, community leaders, and other key stakeholders who have an important role in prioritizing investments. They also are focused on learning lessons from Maui so that a tragedy like what happened on the island never happens again.

Recognizing the growing threat created by wildfires, the Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council (ESCC), which serves as the principal liaison between the federal government and the electric power industry on efforts to prepare for, and respond to, national-level disasters or threats to critical infrastructure, created the ESCC Wildfire Working Group (WWG) in 2020.⁵

Through the WWG, the Departments of Energy, Agriculture, and Interior, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are working with electric companies to expedite their ability to remove vegetation within their rights-of-way that pose a threat to their infrastructure; develop and deploy wildfire mitigating technology; expand the use of drones beyond the visual line of sight for infrastructure inspection and damage assessment; and coordinate on wildfire response to restore power safely and more quickly following a wildfire incident.

However, the electric sector alone cannot mitigate the risk of wildfires, the vast majority of which are not caused by electrical equipment.⁶ A holistic approach that brings together many sectors and stakeholders, working collectively and collaboratively, is needed to fully address these risks. Coordination and collaboration are required at all levels of government and with all stakeholders, including among members of Congress, state regulators and legislators, the financial community, insurers, the timber sector, and many others, to address wildfire risks in service of citizens, electricity customers, and landowners.⁷

EI and our member companies share Hawaiian Electric's sorrow about the tragic events of August 8, and we are committed to finding out what happened, as we all work to keep customers and communities safe from future wildfire and extreme weather events. We stand ready to work with the Subcommittee, federal agencies, state government officials, and other stakeholders to address the challenges we all face.

If you or the committee staff have any questions or need additional information regarding our statement, please feel free to reach out to me or have your staff contact Eric Grey (egrey@eei.org; 202-508-5471).

Sincerely,



Thomas R. Kuhn
President & Chief Executive Officer
Edison Electric Institute

⁵ Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council's Wildfire Working Group, <https://www.electricitysubsector.org/-/media/Files/ESCC/Documents/ESCC-Wildfire-Two-Pager.pdf>.

⁶ The two largest causes of wildfires in the U.S. are lightning strikes and human activities. Electrical equipment use is just one of the many human activities that can result in wildfires, which also include smoking, debris burning, camping, railroads, arson, fireworks, children, and other equipment use, among others. See Jennifer K. Balch, et al, *Human-started Wildfires Expand the Fire Niche Across the United States*, PNAS, 114 (11) 2946-2951 (Feb. 27, 2017), <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1617394114>.

⁷ Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission, *Report to Congress* (Sept. 2023), <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf>