

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5496

To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish oversight mediation committees to help resolve property boundary disputes regarding National Forest System land, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 11, 2024

Mr. ROUNDS introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish oversight mediation committees to help resolve property boundary disputes regarding National Forest System land, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Fence Line Fairness
5 Act of 2024”.

1 **SEC. 2. NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM OVERSIGHT MEDIATION**
2 **COMMITTEES.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture (re-
4 ferred to in this section as the “Secretary”), in consulta-
5 tion with State departments of agriculture and State de-
6 partments of natural resources, shall establish in each
7 State in which National Forest System land is located an
8 oversight mediation committee (referred to in this section
9 as a “mediation committee”) to help resolve disputes be-
10 tween private landowners and the Secretary regarding the
11 location of boundaries between National Forest System
12 land and private land.

13 (b) COMPOSITION.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—A mediation committee shall
15 be composed of—

16 (A) 2 individuals who are private, active
17 farmers or ranchers from the State in which the
18 mediation committee is established, to be ap-
19 pointed by the Secretary; and

20 (B) 3 individuals who are private, active
21 farmers or ranchers from the State in which the
22 mediation committee is established, to be ap-
23 pointed by the applicable State department of
24 agriculture or State department of natural re-
25 sources.

1 (2) TERMS.—A member of a mediation com-
2 mittee—

3 (A) shall be appointed for a term of 5
4 years; and

5 (B) may serve for not more than 2 terms.

6 (c) NOTIFICATION.—If there is a dispute regarding
7 the location of a boundary between National Forest Sys-
8 tem land and private land, the Secretary shall—

9 (1) notify the private landowner of the dispute
10 not later than 30 days after the date on which the
11 Secretary becomes aware of the dispute; and

12 (2) provide to the private landowner the option
13 to use the mediation committee process described in
14 subsection (d) to help resolve the dispute.

15 (d) DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS.—

16 (1) REFERRAL.—If a private landowner notifies
17 the Secretary that the landowner chooses to use the
18 mediation committee process referred to in sub-
19 section (c)(2), the Secretary shall refer the dispute
20 to the applicable mediation committee not later than
21 60 days after the date on which the private land-
22 owner notifies the Secretary.

23 (2) PROCESS.—With respect to a dispute re-
24 ferred to a mediation committee under paragraph
25 (1), the mediation committee shall—

1 (A) hold private hearings regarding the
2 dispute to analyze information and testimony
3 from the private landowner and appropriate of-
4 ficials of the Forest Service;

5 (B) provide to the parties to the dispute
6 described in subparagraph (A) recommenda-
7 tions for actions that can be taken by the par-
8 ties to resolve the dispute; and

9 (C) submit a report describing findings of
10 fact regarding the dispute and recommenda-
11 tions described in subparagraph (B) to—

12 (i) the Secretary;

13 (ii) the Chief of the Forest Service;

14 (iii) the head of the applicable State
15 department of agriculture;

16 (iv) the head of the applicable State
17 department of natural resources;

18 (v) the Committee on Agriculture,
19 Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate; and

20 (vi) the Committee on Agriculture of
21 the House of Representatives.

22 (3) TIMELINE.—Not later than 180 days after
23 the date on which a dispute is referred to a medi-
24 ation committee under paragraph (1), the mediation

- 1 committee shall commence holding hearings under
- 2 paragraph (2)(A).

