

PARTNER CAUCUS on FIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING SOLUTIONS

AUGUST 27, 2013

The Honorable Jack Reed
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Murkowski,

We are facing another terrible fire season that is costing lives, damaging properties and harming our public lands and the many resources and jobs that they provide. Once again, the USDA Forest Service has been forced to begin transferring funds from important forest management, restoration, and public service programs to pay for emergency fire suppression. The Forest Service will begin transferring \$600 million from non-fire accounts on August 23 and the Department of the Interior is not far behind in exhausting its available fire funds. We understand that the projected cost of fire suppression in the remainder of the fiscal year may be significantly higher due to extensive droughts and fire danger over wide parts of America.

We ask the Congress and Administration to provide immediate funding to support first responders, as well as implement an enduring solution to fire suppression shortfalls. Our past experiences with transfers of non-fire funds to pay for emergency fire suppression tells us that this transfer will have real, negative impacts on a host of important forestry and related activities that are vital to care for our Nation's forestlands. We also ask the Congress to provide an emergency supplemental at a level of at least \$600 million to fund the Forest Service fire suppression needs and reimburse non-fire funds borrowed for emergency services. Further, we urge Congress to address any fire suppression budget shortfalls in the FY 2014 appropriations process. Congress also needs to establish a long-term solution for fire suppression funding that will finally end the senseless series of fire transfers and guarantee firefighters adequate resources to protect our communities and lands.

Our organizations, representing a diverse set of interests in natural resources, supported the FLAME Act, and expected the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's suppression needs be fully funded, while eliminating the transfer of monies from other agency programs to fund emergency wildfire suppression. However, the FLAME wildfire suppression reserve accounts have only been provided with base funding and not sufficient resources so they could serve as real reserve accounts.

Unfortunately, these transfers do not come as a surprise. In the current fiscal year, the total suppression funding levels were well below the forecast levels for this fire season. These transfers mean less forest management, road maintenance, lost jobs, among many more impacts, *and* long-term increased fire risk and costs. Furthermore, the current emergency funding circumstances have caused the Forest Service Chief to tell all his field staff to halt normal activities so as to conserve

funds for additional emergency fire needs. This has had an immediate chilling action on a wide variety of vital activities affecting a huge part of America.

While we do not question the need to pay for firefighting, the current model is designed to fail. Funds that should be used to proactively reduce hazardous forest conditions through management, thereby reducing long-term fire danger, are instead redirected towards predictable fire suppression expenses. Programs funded by Congress that help restore and maintain healthy forests on both public and private lands get shortchanged. We believe that investments that improve forest resiliency are ultimately cheaper for the government because they are proven to reduce the intensity and duration of damaging fires, while also creating stable jobs and enhancing our forest habitats for clean water, wildlife and recreation.

We commend the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for their pending fiscal year 2014 bills that focus on this issue for next year, but immediate action is needed to deal with the current emergencies. Whether through a continuing resolution or annual appropriations legislation, we strongly urge Congress to continue supporting adequate suppression and emergency wildfire funding in FY2014. In the longer-term, we find that the only way to truly address emergency wildfire is to treat wildfires like any other national emergency. We are prepared to assist Congress in developing and promoting a sustainable long-term solution to emergency wildfire suppression.

Congress must act to provide the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior with an emergency wildfire budget structure that will enable them to succeed. Failure to do so will continue to cripple the ability of the Forest Service to deliver on its mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of our Nation's forests. We appreciate your past, positive actions supporting natural resources and we urgently need your leadership to quickly reimburse the non-fire funds transferred to fund ongoing fire suppression efforts around the country and minimize the negative impacts of our failed fire funding policy. We appreciate your support and look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Members of the Fire Suppression Funding Solutions Partner Caucus

CC: Senate Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITY TREES
AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION
AMERICAN FORESTS
APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB

For information regarding this letter or members of the Fire Suppression Funding Solutions Partner Caucus, please contact Cecilia Clavet, Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters, cecilia.clavet@mail.wvu.edu, 304-212-8008.

APPLEGATE PARTNERSHIP AND WATERSHED COUNCIL
ARIZONA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES
ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL GRASSLANDS
BLACK HILLS FOREST RESOURCE ASSOCIATION
BLACK HILLS REGIONAL MULTIPLE USE COALITION
BLUE MOUNTAINS FOREST PARTNERS
CALIFORNIA FIRE SAFE COUNCIL
CDF FIREFIGHTERS IAFF L2881
CENTRAL OREGON INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL
CHOOSE OUTDOORS
CITY OF KIRKLAND
CLUB 20 - ASSOCIATION OF 21 WESTERN CO COUNTIES
COLORADO BARK BEETLE COOPERATIVE
COLORADO TIMBER INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
COLORADO TREE FARMERS
CONSERVATION NORTHWEST
CRILEY CONSULTING
DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE
ECOSYSTEM WORKFORCE PROGRAM
FEDERAL FOREST RESOURCE COALITION
FIREFIGHTERS UNITED FOR SAFETY, ETHICS, AND ECOLOGY (FUSEE)
FLATHEAD ECONOMIC POLICY CENTER
FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY
FOREST BUSINESS NETWORK LLC
FOREST ENERGY CORPORATION
FOREST GUILD
FRAMING OUR COMMUNITY
FRONT RANGE ROUNDTABLE
FUTURE FOREST, LLC
IDAHO CONSERVATION LEAGUE
IDAHO FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION
IDAHO FOREST RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP
INDIANA FORESTRY & WOODLAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION
INTERMOUNTAIN FOREST ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS
INTERNATIONAL CODE COUNCIL
LASSEN FOREST PRESERVATION GROUP
MAINLAND PLANNING INC
MALHEUR LUMBER COMPANY
MONTANA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
MT. TAYLOR MACHINE, LLC

NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF FOREST OWNERS
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FOREST SERVICE RETIREES
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY FOREST RESOURCES PROGRAMS
NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL NETWORK OF FOREST PRACTITIONERS
NATIONAL SKI AREAS ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL VOLUNTEER FIRE COUNCIL
NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION
NATIONAL WOODLAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION
NEW MEXICO COUNCIL OF TROUT UNLIMITED
NEW MEXICO FOREST INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
NORTHWEST FOREST WORKER CENTER
OUTDOOR ALLIANCE
PELLET FUELS INSTITUTE
PINCHOT INSTITUTE
PUBLIC LANDS COUNCIL
QUAIL AND UPLAND WILDLIFE FEDERATION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN TREE-RING RESEARCH
RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY
SALMON VALLEY STEWARDSHIP
SDSU WILDFIRE RESEARCH CENTER
SIERRA CLUB
SIERRA FOREST LEGACY
SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS
SOUTHERN OREGON FOREST RESTORATION COLLABORATIVE
SUSTAINABLE NORTHWEST
SWAN ECOSYSTEM CENTER
TELLER COUNTY HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY
TREE MUSKETEERS
TROUT UNLIMITED
TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND
UNCOMPAHGRE/COM
UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH
VILLAGE OF NORTHBROOK
WATERSHED RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER
WEST RANGE RECLAMATION, LLC
WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER
WISCONSIN WOODLAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION
WYOMING STOCK GROWERS ASSOCIATION