

# 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](mailto:cecilia.clavet@mail.wvu.edu), 304-212-8008.*

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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  
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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  
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