

April 2, 2014

The Honorable Ken Calvert
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Moran
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member Moran:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our strong support for maintaining effective funding levels in the fiscal year (FY) 2015 appropriations process for essential wildfire risk reduction and protection programs at the USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior. The important work accomplished through the Hazardous Fuels programs and the State Fire Assistance program help decrease total federal emergency wildfire suppression costs and help reduce the threat of fire to communities and valuable public lands.

America's forests and forest-dependent communities are at risk from outbreaks of pests and pathogens, persistent drought, and the buildup of hazardous fuels. Urbanization and development patterns are placing more homes and communities near fire-prone landscapes, leading to more destructive and costly wildfires. In 2013, 47,579 wildland fires burned more than 4.3 million acres. In the wake of these larger fires, 2,135 structures were destroyed, including over 1090 residences. Of the 72,681 communities across the country currently at risk of wildland fire, only 12,434 (i.e. 17.5%) have prepared a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Reducing the number and extent of damaging wildland fires and keeping life and property safe requires coordination across federal, state, tribal and local units of government. Hazardous Fuels and State Fire Assistance programs have a significant role in reducing the threat of wildland fire on federal, state, private, county, municipal and tribal lands and further help communities and first responders prepare for and respond to wildland fires quickly and safely.

The Forest Service and Department of the Interior were forced to transfer \$636 million in FY 2013 to fund fire suppression activities. In the span of only two years – FY 2012 and 2013 – the agencies were forced to transfer more than \$1 billion that Congress had appropriated to other priority programs to fund wildland fire suppression. ***We urge you to avoid transfers in FY 2015 and beyond by including language mirroring the bi-partisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, introduced in the House and Senate (S. 1875 & H.R. 3992). This important change to fire funding at the federal level is needed to prevent future transfers and ensure that the Forest Service and Department of the Interior can achieve their land management objectives by implementing activities needed to address the growing buildup of hazardous fuels on federal lands.***

The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act would not only relieve agencies by funding a portion of suppression like other natural disasters, but also provide appropriators with the added flexibility in the Interior Appropriations bill to allocate funding for activities that reduce fire risk and long-

term suppression costs. The following recommendations for hazardous fuels are based on the enactment of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.

The Hazardous Fuels Programs at the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior are the primary source of funding used to reduce wildfire risk on Federal lands. In FY 2013, the Forest Service treated over 2.6 million acres—with over 1.7 million of those acres within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Bureaus at the Department of Interior treated 643,184 acres in FY 2013—over 73% of which were in the WUI. ***In FY 2015, we urge you to provide \$479 million for the Hazardous Fuels Program at the USDA Forest Service and \$178 million for the Hazardous Fuels Program at the Department of the Interior.***

	FY14 Enacted	FY15 President's Proposal	Request
	<i>in millions</i>		
USDA Forest Service Hazardous Fuels	\$307	\$479*	\$479
Department of the Interior Hazardous Fuels	\$145	\$145	\$178

* In the USFS FY15 Budget Justification (page 5-3), 25% of hazardous fuels is consolidated into the Integrated Resource Restoration program. In this table, the president's proposed level is calculated for the total level for hazardous fuels.

The State Fire Assistance program, funded through the USDA Forest Service, is a critical tool to help states support local wildland firefighting preparedness, capacity building and wildland fire mitigation. Funds are matched at least dollar-for-dollar from non-Federal sources. In FY 2013, State Fire Assistance directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on nearly 130,000 acres and treated another 119,127 with leveraged funding. State Fire Assistance funds also increased capacity of First Responders in 12,041 communities and directly assisted another 11,562 communities with preventive measures, including fuels reduction in the wildland urban interface. ***We urge you to fund the State Fire Assistance program at \$86 million in FY 2015.***

We appreciate the difficult task the Subcommittee faces in the current budget climate. However, these vital, interrelated programs safeguard human life, habitat, and property, and reduce the overall cost of wildland fire management. The short-term savings realized by cuts to any one of these programs is substantially outweighed by the ultimate increase in suppression costs and damages caused by wildland fires. Accordingly, we urge you to maintain funding for these programs at current FY 2012 enacted levels. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

American Forest Foundation
 American Forests
 American Hiking Society
 American Loggers Council
 Choose Outdoors

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Forest Business Network LLC
Forest Guild
Framing our Community, Inc.
Intermountain Forest Association
International Association of Wildland Fire
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Institute For Elimination of Catastrophic Wildfire
National Rifle Association
National Ski Areas Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
North America Bear Foundation
North American Grouse Partnership
Quality Deer Management Association
Outdoor Industry Association
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Public Lands Foundation
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Society of American Foresters
Sustainable Northwest
The Conservation Fund
The Masters of Foxhound Association
The National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds
The Nature Conservancy
The Pope and Young Club
Tread Lightly!
Watershed Research & Training Center
Whitetails Unlimited, Inc.

Cc: Members of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee