

Help Prevent Forest Fires and Keep Forest Service and Department of the Interior Funding from Going Up in Smoke: Support the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act

February 3, 2014

Dear Colleague:

We invite you to cosponsor the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2014. This bill would end the destructive cycle of underfunding wildfire prevention that results in having to spend even greater amounts fighting wildfires than if our forests were properly managed.

For some time now, our country has witnessed tragic wildfire seasons that have put American lives and our treasured public lands in harm's way, and the risks from these wildfires are likely to increase in the future.

Federal fire suppression spending has increased substantially over the past 20 years. In the case of the Forest Service, the proportion of their budget devoted to wildland fire management has increased steadily from 13% of the total budget in 1991 to 41 percent of the budget in 2013. Most recent fire seasons have cost upwards of one billion dollars, compared to \$200 million in the 1990s.

In eight of the past ten years, the Forest Service has exceeded its budget for wildfire suppression, requiring the Agency to conduct what's known as "fire borrowing" to cover wildfire suppression costs. These transfers are incredibly disruptive and are undermining the core mission of the Forest Service.

What's worse, in order to fund the costs of fighting these wildfires, the agencies responsible for fighting fires are underfunding the very programs designed to prevent fires.

The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act will establish parity for wildfire funding to how the Federal government funds other major natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes. Specifically, the bill would move any spending above 70% of the 10-year rolling average for fire suppression outside of the agencies' baseline budget by making these additional costs eligible to be funded under a separate disaster account.

Based on Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture analysis, 1% of wildland fires represent 30% of costs, so in essence this legislation would be moving the true emergency fire events to be funded under disaster programs, and the routine wildland firefighting costs would be funded through the normal budgeting and appropriations process.

And most importantly, this legislation would free up as much as \$412 million in discretionary funding to make sure urgently needed work is done in the forests to prevent wildland fires.

Sincerely,

Mike Simpson
Member of Congress

Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress