

FAQ's on H.R. 2862, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2017

How do we fund wildfire suppression today?

Under current budget structures, wildfire suppression is funded through the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill at the 10-year average. When wildfire costs exceed the budgeted amount, the agencies are forced to borrow from other non-fire accounts to pay for fire suppression. This means that funding intended for hazardous fuels removal and other important land management activities gets diverted to fire suppression before those projects can be completed. If Congress pays back these accounts, it is usually too late to make a difference.

Because the cost of federal wildfire suppression has increased substantially over the past 20 years, fire borrowing has occurred eight out of the past 10 years. This extraordinary measure has become routine. **Robbing these accounts year after year means that important forest management projects don't get done, leaving unhealthy forests that are more susceptible to expensive catastrophic wildfires.** According to the Forest Service, it spent only 16% of its total budget fighting wildfires in 1995. Wildfire costs had increased to 56% of its total budget in 2016. And by 2025, that number could increase to nearly 70% if nothing is done to fix the budgeting process. This crowds out other important programs that are funded through the Interior and Environment Appropriations bill.

What does H.R. 2862 do?

H.R. 2862 would fund catastrophic wildfires like other natural disasters. Under the Budget Control Act, agencies responding to natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, or tornadoes have access to disaster funding through a budget cap adjustment. H.R. 2862 would make catastrophic wildfire suppression eligible for similar disaster funding, significantly reducing the need for fire borrowing when wildfire suppression costs are exhausted.

Most importantly, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act would protect land management programs by shielding the budget from the increasing 10-year average. Wildfire suppression would still be funded through the normal budgeting and appropriations process, but when the Forest Service exceeds its annual wildfire suppression budget, the agency would be able to fund wildfire fighting costs like other natural disasters. This would allow the Forest Service and other land management agencies to preserve the resources in their wildfire prevention accounts, ultimately reducing the chance that catastrophic wildfires will grow in size and cost.

Why 100% through the regular budget?

In a change from last Congress, H.R. 2862 would allow access to a budget cap adjustment once 100% of the 10-year average for regular wildfire costs is exhausted. As fire seasons become longer and hotter, it is important that sufficient funds are available for wildfire suppression.

This legislation addresses the most significant problem, which is the growing costs of wildfires that have eroded the Forest Service budget. H.R. 2862 would freeze the 10-year average at 2015 levels, essentially allowing wildfires to be appropriately funded as disasters, which would stop the budgetary impacts of the increasing cost of wildfires.

Does the bill increase spending?

Since H.R. 2862 is similar in scope to last year's H.R. 167, H.R. 2862 would also *not* increase spending. CBO has determined that this cap adjustment approach does not score. Like prior versions of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, H.R. 2862 is a budget process bill, not a spending bill.

Let's be clear: We are always going to pay whatever it costs to fight catastrophic wildfires. We do this today, and we will continue to do so. **H.R. 2862 changes the way we pay for wildfire suppression to bring it in line with the federal response to other natural disasters, and it ends the destructive practice of fire borrowing.** It ensures that agencies comply with the will of Congress by allocating money as Congress instructed, rather than taking money from non-fire accounts to pay for wildfire suppression. It also recognizes the value and cost-effectiveness of preventing wildfires versus fighting them by creating healthy forests and reducing the risk of catastrophic fires.

Would the bill take money away from FEMA?

No. The bill does *not* fund wildfire suppression through FEMA's budget, and it does *not* impact the Disaster Relief Fund. Instead, it makes the Forest Service and the DOI eligible for the disaster budget cap adjustment under the Budget Control Act.