

Support a Fix to Wildfire Funding

Cosponsor H.R. 2862

As the west suffers yet another costly and destructive wildfire season, it's clear these events are natural disasters. As of September 5th, there were 81 large fires having burned 1.4 million acres in the western states. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) mobilized active duty personnel to help with wildfire suppression and the fires show no signs of slowing down. And once again, the USDA Forest Service is planning on transferring funding from non-suppression programs to pay for the shortfall in the suppression accounts.

This fire season – like most - underscores the fact that our current wildfire suppression budget process simply does not work. In 1995, the Forest Service spent 16% of their budget on wildfire suppression. Fiscal year 2016 was 56% and it will be more than two-thirds by 2025. This means that the Forest Service spends the majority of its time, funding, and staff resources putting out fires instead of managing our nation's public lands.

This is why we have introduced H.R. 2862, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFFA). The WDFFA discards the old, broken model for wildfire suppression and replaces it with one that funds wildfires like the natural disasters they are.

In recent years, Congress has budgeted for wildfire suppression by appropriating money according to the average cost for wildfires over the past ten years, known as the “rolling ten-year average.” That average continues to rise due to various factors and, too often, this is still not enough to meet suppression needs. When costs exceed an agency's fire budget, that agency is forced to borrow from non-fire accounts to pay for fire suppression. This practice is known as “fire-borrowing.” Robbing these accounts means that the Forest Service and other land management agencies have fewer resources available for forest management activities like hazardous fuels reduction that - ironically - **would prevent catastrophic fires**. As a result, fires get worse and wildfire suppression costs end up devouring the agency's budget.

Last Congress, 150 bipartisan members cosponsored this legislation which would end fire borrowing by funding wildfires like other natural disasters when wildfire suppression costs are exhausted. Most importantly, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act would protect land management programs by protecting the budget from the increasing ten-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 allows the Forest Service and other land management agencies to maintain resources in the prevention accounts they are intended for, ultimately reducing the severity, risk and costs of catastrophic wildfires.

Sincerely,

Mike Simpson

Member of Congress

Kurt Schrader

Member of Congress