

February 3, 2015

California House Delegation U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

RE: H.R. 167 – Wildfire Disaster Funding Act – SUPPORT

Dear California Congressional Delegation Member:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to ask that you support H.R. 167, the "Wildfire Disaster Funding Act" (WDFA) and signon as a cosponsor to the legislation. RCRC is an association of thirty-four rural California counties. The RCRC Board of Directors is composed of elected Supervisors from those member counties.

RCRC is supportive of WDFA and the efforts to reform wildfire suppression funding. Current federal funding mechanisms for suppression activities are unstable and obsolete. WDFA would allow the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United States Department of the Interior (DOI) to access emergency funding through the national disaster funding cap, as other natural disaster mitigation efforts are currently allowed to do. This action would help stabilize programmatic funding levels for other vital initiatives within those agencies that help local governments prepare for wildfires by proactively maintaining forest health. WDFA would end the practice of "fire borrowing," or the shifting of funds from other federal accounts, including those that pay for fire prevention and forest health activities, to wildfire suppression budgets. Most importantly, WDFA would extend the same federal funding mechanism as other natural disasters to wildfire disasters, creating a stable and predictable source of funding for suppression activities. Hundreds of millions of dollars are "borrowed" annually to fund fire suppression efforts on federal forest lands. Since 2000, USDA and DOI have exhausted their funds to fight emergency fires eight different times.

The current funding mechanisms for federal fire suppression activities are not practical; they weaken critical fire prevention and forest management activities and actually increase future fire risk and costs. California's Rim and King Fires were devastating examples of how insufficient forest management and fire-prevention activities can essentially create unbeatable wildfires. In 2013-14, California spent \$240

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million on fire suppression activities, and during the 2014 wildfire season over 500,000 acres were burned including over 200 homes in Weed, California.

Wildfire is the only natural disaster for which the federal government cannot access emergency mitigation funds. WDFA would finally provide the authorization to USDA and DOI to access a small emergency funding cap adjustment. This bill would help ensure post-disaster mitigation funding is not detrimentally affected by the cost of actual disaster response. WDFA does this without affecting the current structure of the Stafford Act. Additionally, creating a new funding mechanism that allows funding to be set aside ahead of time to pay for the largest and most costly wildfire disasters would minimize budget uncertainty, and would incentivize the land management agency in slating and performing prevention and forest health projects.

Fixing the wildfire funding budget is a critical first step in making our forests healthier. We urge you co-sponsorship this crucial legislation. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (916) 447-4806 or chillery@rcrcnet.org.

Sincerely,

CYNDI B. HILLERY Legislative Advocate