



February 13, 2014

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: S. 1875 – Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2013: SUPPORT

Dear Senator Feinstein:

On behalf of the thirty-four member counties of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to thank you for your co-sponsorship of S. 1875, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2013, and your leadership on the issue of forestry and fire. As you know, this bipartisan bill would prevent “borrowing” from other accounts at the Departments of Interior and the Department of Agriculture to pay for wildfire suppression efforts when those accounts become depleted in years when fire suppression needs exceed budgeted funds.

Unfortunately, the current funding system leaves fire prevention and other forest management activities shortchanged. The Rim Fire was a devastating example of how insufficient forest management and fire prevention activities can create essentially un-fightable wildfires. With a drought disaster declaration in the first month of the year, California’s 2014 fire season will likely be worse than any other. Without some mechanism to continue to fund prevention and fuels reduction efforts statewide and throughout the western United States, disaster-level fires will become more and more prevalent.

This legislation would extend to wildfire disasters the same federal funding mechanism for response to other natural disasters, and eliminate the budgeting uncertainty of transferring funds within the Departments to pay for wildfire disasters. Since 2000 these agencies have exhausted their funds to fight emergency fires eight times.

Additionally, this legislation would enable the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to utilize emergency appropriations for wildfire suppression when expenses exceed 70% of the 10-year average. This additional funding would be provided outside the normal discretionary appropriations process. Furthermore,

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“savings” could be made available for forest treatments (such as hazardous fuels removal) that help to reduce fire risk and costs.

RCRC has joined a broad coalition of more than 130 groups who have endorsed this legislation and its companion measure in the House – H.R. 3992.

We hope your colleagues in the Legislature see the wisdom in this measure and enable this funding to be available in the coming fiscal year should it be needed to fight another aggressive fire season. As mentioned previously, drought conditions in California and across the western United States are already raising concerns about the adequacy of fire suppression funding. We would encourage this legislation be in place before the traditional fire season begins later this year.

Again, thank you for your co-sponsorship of legislation and your leadership on forest management issues. We look forward to working with you to ensure healthy forests and adequate funding for firefighting and fire prevention needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cyndi B. Hillery".

CYNDI B. HILLERY
Legislative Advocate

cc: California Congressional Delegation