

PARTNER CAUCUS on FIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING SOLUTIONS

FEBRUARY XX, 2014

Dear Members of Congress:

For years the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) have “robbed from Peter to pay Paul,” by transferring money out of vital agency programs and services in order to fund wildfire suppression costs. This practice is negatively affecting land management programs including those that decrease long-term wildfire risk and costs.

The Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions believes that the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, S. 1875 and H.R. 3992, offers a promising approach to managing emergency wildfire suppression costs without impacting other priority programs within the responsible agencies. This bill would fund a portion of the USFS and DOI wildfire suppression costs through a budget cap adjustment similar to the budget cap exemption currently in use by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. This bill will not change federal fire suppression policies or strategies and will not change the cost of fire suppression, and thus will have a neutral impact on federal spending and the federal budget deficit. The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act would provide a reliable funding structure, consistent with that used by other agencies responding to natural disaster emergencies. The act will enable the agencies to meet their land management and emergency response objectives.

Longer fire seasons, increased development in the wildland-urban interface, and millions of acres of forests with fuel loads exceeding the historic range of variability are among the many factors contributing to the repeated need to transfer funds from non-fire programs to pay for wildfire suppression. In January 2009, a diverse coalition of organizations came together to find a solution to the repeated fire transfers, and corresponding reductions to other agency programs – many of which reduce long-term fire risk. The Partner Caucus represents a diverse set of international, national and local organizations interested in sustainable forest management on private, tribal, municipal, state, and federal lands.

Critical landscape management activities are often postponed or canceled as a result of fire transfers from non-suppression agency accounts once annual wildfire suppression funds are depleted. For example, the USFS wildfire management activities (the largest component of which is suppression) rose from 13 percent of the agency’s FY 1991 budget to nearly 50 percent over the last several fiscal years. Consequently, landscape management has been negatively impacted across all lands including national forests and on DOI lands, such as our national parks, and state and private lands.

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As we continue to experience longer fire seasons, the practice of transferring funds from non-fire programs to pay for emergency wildfire response will continue unless Congress adopts the solution proffered by the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. The federal agencies responsible for managing wildfires and public lands must be armed with the tools and resources that will enable them to succeed. The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act is critically important to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of our nation's forests.

We respectfully urge you to support the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, S. 1875 and H.R. 3992.

Sincerely,

*** Sign On ***