

Rural County Representatives of California: Wildfire Debate Resumes in Congress

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August 18, 2018 - California's wildfire season has brought forest management back to the forefront of policy discussions in Congress. Wildfire suppression funds at the Department of Interior and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) would receive a much needed boost under the various proposals for the Fiscal 2019 federal budget, but the agencies currently have \$66.8 million and \$114 million remaining in their suppression funds.

Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby (R-Alabama) says he has not received any requests for emergency funding for wildfire suppression costs, but that additional funds could be tacked on to one of Congress's spending measures for Fiscal 2019. In the meantime, House Republicans are urging their colleagues to pass pieces of HR 2936, Representative Bruce Westerman's (R-Arkansas) proposal to increase active forest management practices to reduce wildfires.

The Trump Administration is also pushing for more forest management policies to increase forest resiliency. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke also called for more active forest management in a visit to California earlier in the week. In addition, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue also said the USFS would devote more funds to logging and controlled burns on federal forest land to reduce available fuel for wildfires.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced it will implement a new strategy to collaborate more closely with partners at state and local levels. The USDA and USFS will empower states to play a larger role in setting wildfire suppression objectives to better leverage the federal government's resources.

Source: Rural County Representatives of California

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