



October 13, 2009

Honorable Peter Orszag  
 Director, Office of Management and Budget  
 Executive Office of the President  
 Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Orszag,

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) represents the directors of forestry agencies from the fifty states, eight U.S. territories and associated states, and the District of Columbia. State Foresters have the primary responsibility for the restoration, management and protection of 2/3rds of the nation's forests (i.e. those outside federal ownership). We write today to bring attention to the imperative need to release the stranglehold that emergency wildfire suppression costs are having on the budget and programs of the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Interior

The cost of suppressing wildfires has grown enormously in recent years and projections indicate that this trend will only increase as a result of hazardous fuels build-up, a changing climate, and expansion of human dwellings into wildland areas. The Forest Service alone has spent over \$1 billion per year in five of the last seven years to extinguish fires. Fire suppression, the largest component of agency wildland fire management activities, rose from 13% of the agency's budget in fiscal year 1991 to close to 50% in 2009. Extraordinary emergency wildland fire suppression activities account for over 95% of all burned acres and consume more than 85% of all suppression costs. These are not average wildfires; they should be treated as other natural disasters to avoid severe depletion of the agency's constrained budgets. The Department of the Interior is increasingly impacted by their suppression costs and that trend is expected to continue without the approval of a new budgeting process like the FLAME fund.

The outdated budgeting process the Forest Service uses to calculate suppression costs often forces the agency to transfer already limited dollars from other essential agency programs to cover the increasing cost of fire suppression. In fact, the very programs that could reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fires, ease the impact of fire suppression costs and more effectively protect people and property are also the ones that are subject to transfers of funds later in the fire season as fire suppression costs increase. Even with the diversion of funds, the Forest Service is regularly compelled to request supplemental funding from Congress.

NASF has long sought a more stable funding solution to the increasing costs of fire suppression and its negative impacts on the agency's budget. State Foresters alongside many other organizations support Section 431 of the Senate engrossed FY 2010 Interior-Appropriations which establishes the FLAME fund specifically for suppression of catastrophic emergency wildland fires. The fund will cover the costs of fire suppression separately from emergency events and would eliminate the need to borrow from other programs designed to protect people and property from the risk of uncharacteristically large wildfires. In

**Executive Director**  
 Jay Farrell

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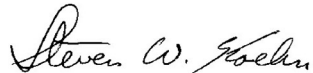
Jim Barresi, New Jersey  
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our view, the FLAME Fund will complement the Contingency Reserve Fund (included in the President's FY 2010 Budget Proposal) by:

- Instituting clear guidelines regarding the conditions for which emergency funds can be accessed;
- Establishing specific accounting requirements regarding how FLAME funds can be spent; and
- Requiring agencies to budget for emergency and nonemergency fire in future years.

We hope you will join us in supporting the FLAME Fund (Sec. 431 of the Senate engrossed bill) as the solution to cover the rising cost of emergency fire suppression. Please feel free to contact me in the event you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven W. Koehn".

Steven W. Koehn  
NASF President

Cc: Ms. Sally Ericsson

Enclosures (1)