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For Immediate Release

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Coalition Calls for Emergency Supplemental to Repay Fire Transfers

Congress Asked to Repay \$636 Million for Wildland Firefighting through Emergency Supplemental; Short Lifeline to Stewardship Contracting; Longer-Term FY 2014 Solution Needed

September 16, 2013 (Arlington, Virginia) — A coalition of conservation, forestry, recreation, and wildlife groups submitted a letter to Congress today supporting its interest in repaying FY 2013 fire transfers, and urging an emergency supplemental that reimburses the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior **\$636 million for shortfalls in 2013 fire suppression money**. The coalition expressed appreciation for this action by the **House Appropriations Committee** in their proposed Continuing Resolution released September 10, as well as a temporary extension for the stewardship contracting authority.

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior ran out of money to fight wildfires in August of 2013, and transferred money from other critical programs to cover the shortfall. Shortly thereafter, the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions called upon the House and Senate Appropriation Committees to repay fire funding transfers and back Stewardship Contracting in the FY 2014 Continuing Resolution. This coalition urges the Congress to use emergency designated funds for these disaster expenses. Emergency funds will ensure that the available FY 2014 funding for other critical forestry programs is not reduced by cost overruns experienced during this year's tragic fire season.

The coalition also strongly encouraged Congress to find a long-term solution that would preclude the need to borrow money to fight inevitable fires each year, and disrupt critical forest programs that help people, water, and wildlife. In FY 1991, fire spending accounted for roughly 13% of the total USDA Forest Service budget, while in FY 2012 fire spending ate up more than 40% of the agency's annual budget. Nine of the ten most expensive seasons for fire suppression costs have occurred since 2000. Unfortunately, fire transfers are not a new phenomena; particularly at the USDA Forest Service. From FY 2002 to FY2012, the agency transferred \$2.8 billion from non-suppression accounts within USFS. These transfers deplete non-fire accounts within the agency, halting important forest management activities such as those that could help reduce wildfire risk and suppression costs in the future.

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In addition, the letter requested a longer term commitment to Stewardship Contracting beyond FY 2013. Stewardship Contracting was originally authorized in 2003 for 10 years, and requires reauthorization in FY 2014 if the program is to continue. Authorized for ten years in 2003, Stewardship Contracting allows the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to pay private contractors to restore forests and reduce wildfire risk. Since its inception, 1,269 stewardship contracts have been awarded that promote healthy forests, reduce fire hazards, and increase watershed resilience on national forests, while expanding business and job opportunities.

Without a change, the current emergency fire funding structure is designed to fail. Congress can help the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior by providing them with the tools they need to succeed. Stewardship Contracting and a proper emergency fire funding structure are two critical tools for the Agencies.

Letter signatories:

American Forest Foundation

American Forests

Federal Forest Resources Coalition

National Association of Forest Service Retirees

National Association of State Foresters

National Ski Areas Association

Ruffed Grouse Society

Society of American Foresters

Sustainable Northwest

The Nature Conservancy

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