

Fix the Wildfire Funding Problem and Support Forest Management Reforms



ABOUT NASF

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is composed of the directors of state and territorial forestry agencies and the District of Columbia.

NASF represents State and Territorial Forester interests by influencing forest policy and leading efforts to optimize social, economic, and environmental benefits of trees and forests.

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Today's fire seasons are on average 78 days longer than in the 1970s and are projected to grow hotter, more unpredictable, and more expensive. State Foresters urge leaders in Congress to pass legislation this year that fixes the broken wildfire funding system and addresses much-needed forest management reforms, either separately or in tandem.

- Over the last few decades, the portion of the USDA Forest Service's budget dedicated to fire has grown from under 20 percent to more than 50 percent of the agency's total budget.
- As wildfire eats up a significantly larger share of the agency's budget, critical funding that supports federal, state and private forests is reduced. Compounding the issue is a practice known as "fire borrowing", which occurs when the agency runs out of appropriated funding in a given year. Fire borrowing robs money from non-wildfire programs to pay for the current year's fire suppression needs.
- In order to cover wildfire suppression costs in recent years, the USDA Forest Service has been forced to dismiss employees early, cancel contracts and halt plans to fill critical positions that conserve and protect our nation's forests, both public and private.
- Examples of projects cancelled as a result of fire borrowing include forest thinning activities, firefighter training, purchases of firefighting equipment and recreation projects.

The National Association of State Foresters urges Congress to pass a bipartisan solution before the spring wildfire season begins.

The wildfire funding and forest health situations are continuing to deteriorate as a result of Congressional inaction.

A solution must:

1. End late-season fire borrowing.
2. Stop the long-term erosion of funding for non-wildfire suppression programs due to the increasing share of the budget going to wildfire funding. This considerably reduces funding to address insect and disease threats, provide firefighting assistance grants to states, protect America's urban forests where 80 percent of Americans reside, and impact State Foresters.
3. Encourage significantly more active federal forest management, either associated with fire funding reform or separately. State Foresters support rewarding collaboration, streamlining the National Environmental Policy Act process and expanding the use of categorical exclusions, such as for more active post-fire salvage, reforestation and more.

Public benefits including clean air and water, wildlife habitat, places to recreate and jobs are all at risk if we don't have healthy, resilient forests. We need legislation that enables more active forest management on all lands, public and private, through budget process changes and federal forest reforms.

America's forests urgently need a fix that will fund these catastrophic wildfires as we fund other natural disasters and increase active forest management.