

Press Release



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Senate Proposes Cutting Wildland Fire Prevention Fund after Record Decade, and Year, of Destructive Fires

Group of Western Senators Sends Letter to Maintain Support for Programs to the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

NOVEMBER 28, 2011 (Arlington, Virginia) — A group of nine Western Senators are ringing the alarm about a 2012 proposal to cut support from two wildland fire prevention programs, the Hazardous Fuels and State Fire Assistance programs.

These critical programs provide funding for work that makes people and forests safer, through thinning and controlled burn projects on National Forest System and state and private forest lands.

Investments in the Hazardous Fuels and State Fire Assistance programs also save money, by offering preventative actions that limit costly emergency fires. Yet today we spend 4 times more money fighting emergency fires in our National Forests than we invest in preventing these destructive fires from occurring in the first place.

The cuts are proposed on the heels of the nation's worst recorded fire decade, with record wildfires across the West and South. This most recent fire season burned more than 8 million acres of the nation's forests—an area larger than New Jersey and Connecticut combined. Only five times has the nation experienced more than 8 million acres burned in a year; all of these have occurred since 2004.

As proposed in the Senate 2012 budget, these fire prevention programs would be cut nearly \$100 million from the funding levels proposed in the House. The Senate proposes to fund these programs at \$333 million, representing more than a 25% reduction from funding levels enacted in the last fiscal year.

“In light of the clear growing risk of destructive wildland fires, it seems unwise to eliminate investment in a program that makes people and forests safer,” said **Chris Topik, Director of The Nature Conservancy's Restoring America's Forest program**. “America's forests

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provide jobs, clean water, clean air, material for construction and energy, wildlife habitat, and recreation. We will regret not investing in these programs.”

Scott Hunt, Arizona State Forester, indicated that this past season’s “Wallow” fire in central eastern Arizona burned 538,000 acres and threatened multiple communities.

“We did have some unfortunate fire losses that included 36 residences and commercial structures, but the positive note in these figures is that hundreds of more homes were saved due to wildland urban interface hazardous fuel treatments,” said **Hunt**. “Many of these treatments were funded with State Fire Assistance grants in these eastern Arizona communities.”

John Shannon, President of the National Association of State Foresters, indicated that “these programs are essential to protecting the nearly 70,000 communities across the country where life and property are left vulnerable to wildland fire.”

Besides the aesthetic benefits forests provide, they also cover one-third of the United States; store and filter half the nation’s water supply; provide jobs to more than a million wood products workers; absorb nearly 20% of U.S. carbon emissions; offer 650 million acres of recreational lands that generate well over \$15 billion in economic activity annually; and provide habitat for thousands of species across the country.

Forest restoration efforts are particularly needed now. The Nature Conservancy estimates 120 million acres of America’s forests—an area bigger than the state of California—are in immediate need of restoration due to pests, climate change, and a century’s worth of fire suppression that have left our forests overgrown with brush.

Copies of the Western Senators letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee can be requested from Jon Schwedler of The Nature Conservancy at jschwedler@tnc.org.

Data on fire can be found on the National Interagency Fire Center website: www.nifc.gov.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to preserve the diversity of life on Earth for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide. www.nature.org.

About the National Association of State Foresters

The National Association of State Foresters is comprised of the directors of state and territorial forestry agencies and the District of Columbia. NASF seeks to advance sustainable forestry, conservation, and protection of forest lands and their associated resources. <http://www.stateforesters.org>