

PARTNER CAUCUS on FIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING SOLUTIONS

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Groups Ask for Comprehensive Wildfire Funding Solution at Senate Hearing on Discussion Draft

June 23, 2016 (Arlington, Va.) — The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee is holding a hearing today to receive testimony on a discussion draft of legislation entitled the “Wildfire Budgeting, Response and Forest Management Act of 2016.”

[In a letter to the committee](#), a group of over 100 environmental, business, industry, and recreation groups expressed concern with the eroding budgets facing the Department of the Interior and USDA Forest Service. With such a steep amount of the money being used for wildfire suppression, agencies are left with significantly less for a multitude of federal, state, and private land programs, including those that would help reduce the risk of future fires.

The committee proposes a partial solution to fire funding that includes accessing disaster funding and significantly reducing the practice of transferring funds from non-suppression programs when firefighting funds run short. The groups recommend a comprehensive fire funding solution that would: 1) access disaster funds; 2) minimize transfers; *and* 3) most importantly, address the impacts of the increasing costs on programs when budgets are developed.

“We appreciate this committee’s recognition of the wildfire funding issue that places an annual burden on federal agency budgets,” said **Cecilia Clavet of The Nature Conservancy, on behalf of the Fire Suppression Funding Solutions Partner Caucus**. “However, we also need to address the bigger problem of rising firefighting costs and the resulting impacts on programs when budgeting takes place. Too many important public land programs are shortchanged.”

Quotes from some of the many organizations supporting a comprehensive fire funding fix:

“American Forests appreciates Congress’ focus on trying to solve our national wildfire funding problem,” said **Rebecca Turner, Senior Director of Programs and Policy, American Forests**. “A comprehensive approach is needed now to fund both the programs essential to the health of our forests as well as the ever-rising costs of fire suppression. We look forward to working with Congress to get sensible wildfire funding passed.”

“Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation-based economies are not only vulnerable to wildfire risk but are forced to shoulder the financial burden when public lands funding is shortchanged due to the increasing costs of wildfire suppression,” said **Diana Madson, Executive Director of the Mountain Pact**. “We thank the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for their recognition of the impact of wildfire funding on USDA and DOI budgets and we urge them to address this growing problem through a comprehensive funding fix.”

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“While we appreciate that language in the Discussion Draft will eliminate the seriously illogical wildfire funding process, it does nothing to address the equally illogical current situation that continues to result in the erosion of funds from the very natural resource management programs that prevent future catastrophic wildfires from destroying resources, communities, and the lives of fire fighters,” said **Hank Kashdan, Legislative Director, National Association of Forest Service Retirees**. “The Committee has an opportunity to address both issues. The American People deserve the Committee doing exactly that.”

“State Foresters appreciate the draft bill language which would curtail the need for cancelling contracts and agreements for non-fire suppression work at the end of the summer fire season to pay for suppression costs,” said **Paul DeLong, Wisconsin State Forester and President of the National Association of State Foresters**. “However, we still must address the significant challenge of fire suppression funding subsuming increasingly larger amounts of the agency budget, some of which would actually fund work to reduce wildfire risk.”

“We need Congress to make fixing the wildfire budgeting problem a priority right now to stop the profound impacts that funding transfers have had on public land recreation, and in turn, rural economies,” said **Michael Berry, President of the National Ski Areas Association**. “It is imperative that the fix be comprehensive in nature. The ski industry is incredibly grateful for Congress’ attention to this critical issue.”

“Outdoor recreation drives a \$646 billion economy that relies on funding and infrastructure for recreation assets,” said **Jessica Wahl, Government Affairs Manager at the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA)**. “As land management agencies are dealing with hotter and longer fire seasons, addressing a comprehensive wildfire funding fix will help maintain dollars allotted for programs that get youth outside, employ Americans in gateway communities and contribute to the national economy.”

“The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition appreciates the committee’s pledge to address the crippling impacts of longer fire seasons and increasing suppression costs on the Forest Service’s budget. The escalating problem deeply impacts the agency’s ability to invest in other, critical programs that create and maintain jobs in our rural communities,” said **Karen Hardigg, Coordinator for Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition**. “Any solution must include a comprehensive fix in order to improve outcomes for our communities, our landscapes and our economies.”

“As climate change drives more frequent and intense fires across our western forests, it’s clear that a solution for wildfire borrowing is urgently needed,” said **Athan Manuel, Director of Public Lands Protection at the Sierra Club**. “That fix should be focused on addressing increasing wildfire costs.”

“SAF is encouraged that bipartisan leaders in the House and Senate continue to explore options to fix wildfire suppression funding,” said **Clark W. Seely, CF, President of the Society of American Foresters**. “While the discussion draft makes great strides in addressing the holistic nature of the problem, SAF is concerned that the disaster funding language is not a comprehensive budgetary solution. Without addressing the rapidly increasing 10-year average, less and less will continue to be available for forest management, restoration, research, recreation, and other critical private and public land objectives.”