



August 26, 2013

**NASF Statement on USDA Forest Service Fire Suppression Fund Transfers:
*Underfunded suppression to get relief by transferring \$600 million from already constrained forestry budgets***

Last week the USDA Forest Service (USFS) began transferring \$600 million from other programs within the Agency to pay for fighting wildland fires. The transfer will have widespread impacts on important forest management, research and development, and technical assistance programs funded by the USFS; many of which will directly impact State Foresters and the important forestry programs they deliver throughout the Country. The Department of the Interior (DOI) is facing a similar shortfall in wildland fire funding and is expected to follow suit with transfers in the near future. Unfortunately, these transfers do not come as a surprise. In the current fiscal year, the total suppression funding levels were well below the ten-year average and forecasted levels for suppression. Funds that should be used to manage forests, and thereby reduce long-term fire danger, are instead being redirected towards fire suppression expenses.

Among the many negative impacts of this transfer, the USFS and State Foresters will experience shortfalls that will result in less forest management, less road and trail maintenance, less technical assistance provided to landowners, and without funds to manage our forests to reduce the threat of future fires, long term fire risk and costs will continue to rise. Unfortunately, fire transfers are not new to the USFS. In the ten-year period from fiscal year (FY) 2002 to FY 2012, the Agency transferred \$2.8 billion from non-suppression accounts to fund wildfire suppression.

“With suppression inadequately funded, it’s not a surprise that we’re in a transfer situation once again, but these transfers add insult to injury,” said National Association of State Foresters President and West Virginia State Forester Randy Dye. “States are still dealing with the impacts from last year’s transfers and now another round will further disrupt state forestry work and harm those important partnerships cultivated when developing forest projects.”

The cost of fire suppression for the USFS has grown substantially in recent years. In FY 1991, fire spending accounted for roughly 13% of the total USFS budget, while in FY 2012 fire spending ate up more than 40% of the Agency’s annual budget.¹ According to the National Interagency Fire Center the USFS has already spent more than \$1 billion on wildfire suppression this year and reached [preparedness level 5](#) for the first time since 2008. The FLAME Act² was meant to address this problem, but has not been implemented as intended and is clearly not working to prevent fire transfers.

“We are again facing catastrophic wildfires in the West and our federal partners, USFS and DOI, need an emergency wildfire budget structure that will keep Americans safe from wildfire and protect our natural resources without compromising their land management budgets,” said Idaho State Forester David Groeschl. “Robbing their land management budgets to pay for fire further erodes their ability to actively manage our federal lands and creates greater wildfire risks. Federal land management agencies need the laws, policies, and resources that do not hamstring their ability to achieve their mission to manage and sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of our nation’s forests.”

State Foresters urge Congress to work quickly to replenish accounts impacted by the transfer to minimize the negative impacts and to redouble efforts to find a long-term solution for wildland fire funding at the federal level.

¹ Statement of Thomas Tidwell, Chief, U.S. Forest Service, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. June 25, 2013.

² Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement Act of 2009.

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If you would like more information regarding expected impacts from the transfer in your area, contact your State Forester.

The National Association of State Foresters is comprised of the directors of state and territorial forestry agencies and the District of Columbia. Through public-private partnership, NASF seeks to advance sustainable forestry, conservation, and protection of forest lands and their associated resources.

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