



The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
 Chairman, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
 U.S. Senate
 Washington, D.C. 20515

April 10, 2020

Dear Senator Murkowski,

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) thanks you for recognizing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on wildland fire management and the need to ensure that all of our nation’s firefighting personnel and resources are put to use safely and efficiently this wildfire season.

Attacking wildfires when they are small is key to reducing fatalities, injuries, property losses, and wildfire-fighting costs – at the local, state, and federal levels. As we enter a wildfire season complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we agree that aerial firefighting will be an important part of aggressive initial attack strategy in support of our ground-based forces, and that a healthy and safe work environment for wildland firefighters is essential.

Accordingly, we have developed the following recommendations for future COVID-19 stimulus legislation:

Recommendation 1: Provide funding to state forestry agencies to secure Exclusive Use (EU) and Call When Needed (CWN) contracts with available Large Air Tankers (LATs), Very Large Air Tankers (VLATs), Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs), and Type 3 Helicopters. Federal and state coordination will be needed to determine the strategic balance of EU and CWN contracts to ensure resources are available to respond to requests.

Rationale: In anticipation of reduced firefighter personnel and mobilization capacity due to COVID-19, we are recommending that all of the nation’s aerial firefighting resources are contracted with federal and state agencies.

Providing funding to state agencies to secure these contracts in coordination with federal agencies and vendors will provide additional initial attack capacity during anticipated reductions in personnel and mobilization capacity due to COVID-19.

Recommendation 2: Provide emergency supplemental funding for the State Fire Assistance (SFA) program and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) program at a level 20% above the current

appropriation. \$16.4M to the SFA program and \$3.6M to the VFA program would allow for the necessary purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 tests for state and local volunteer firefighters. Such an increase would amount to approximately \$325,000 per state in SFA funding and approximately \$70,000 per state in VFA funding.

Rationale: COVID-19 has increased the need for PPE for state agency and local volunteer firefighters, a need which state agencies and local departments have not budgeted for. This additional COVID-related PPE is essential to keeping firefighters and the public safe when state and local personnel respond to wildfires. Legislating this recommendation would not take PPE supplies away from the medical field and other first responders; instead, it would ensure funding for the necessary purchase of appropriate PPE for wildfire responders when supplies become available.

If rapid result testing becomes available in large quantities, additional funding could be used to secure this resource for state and local volunteer firefighters. Rapid result testing could potentially enhance mobilization of firefighters. Currently some states are requiring mandatory quarantine for any wildland firefighters coming in from out-of-state. Others are not allowing personnel to leave their state. Having tests available could lead to changes in states' policies related to mobilization restrictions and mandatory quarantines.

NASF continues to develop recommendations for stimulus legislation in support of forest-based economies. State forestry agencies provide support to the forestry sector, a key economic sector for our country which supports 2.7 million jobs and nearly 6% of the nation's total manufacturing GDP. We look forward to working with you as Congress continues to develop legislation that will be critical in getting our country back to work.

We appreciate your leadership in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Greg Josten
NASF President
South Dakota State Forester