



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS **444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 540, Washington, DC 20001**

September 11, 2008

Senator Robert C. Byrd, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington DC 20510

Representative David R. Obey, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington DC 20515

**2008
Executive
Committee**

Senator Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington DC 20510

Representative Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington DC 20515

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Dear Chairmen Obey and Byrd, Representative Lewis and Senator Cochran,

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) urges you to provide emergency supplemental appropriations, of an amount sufficient to recover costs, to the US Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) for wildland fire operations. As you are well aware, the wildfire season in California began much earlier and at a greater intensity than in previous years. This activity, along with large fires in North Carolina and across the Southwest, has once again forced the USFS and DOI into a precarious financial situation. USFS projects it will have spent all FY 2008 appropriated Wildland Fire Suppression funds by the beginning of September, well before the end of fire season or the fiscal year. Now that we are in the midst of an active hurricane season, we will likely see an increased need for supplemental funding as USFS takes on greater responsibility for hurricane response and recovery efforts.

In the absence of additional firefighting funding, the USFS has undertaken a grave strategy to move \$400 million from non-fire accounts to support fire suppression efforts. As part of this strategy, the agency will draw from all unobligated balances found in the National Forest System (NFS), Research and State & Private Forestry accounts. This unfortunate action will disrupt activities on NFS lands and with partners at the state and local level. The agency is currently establishing plans to transfer an additional \$200 to \$400 million in the event that the \$1.6 billion (\$1.2 billion appropriated and \$400 million transferred from other accounts) currently available for fire suppression is insufficient to last through the end of fire season.

To date, USFS has transferred over \$35 million from State & Private Forestry programs, including the Forest Legacy Program, of which roughly \$4 million was originally designated for non-governmental partner organizations, including universities and community forestry organizations throughout the country. In Wisconsin and West Virginia alone, roughly 10% of the funds originally designated for those states were lost to fire suppression. These transferred funds were intended for wildfire hazard mitigation planning, economic analysis, and management of invasive forest pests. Without this funding, these projects will either be delayed to future years or canceled altogether. In other parts of the country the news is equally grim. In Washington, over \$1.7 million in high-priority community wildfire protection projects was lost to fire transfer. These projects are designed to mitigate the types of fire we're seeing across much of the West. Sadly, one of the most cost-effective tools for preventing catastrophic wildfires is the first to be transferred to wildland fire suppression.

While the transfer strategy's impact on State & Private Forestry funds is currently at \$35 million, states are also without the support of Forest Service personnel who were redirected from normal operations to participate in the search for additional funding. The fire transfer strategy includes \$20 million from Research projects, including vital fire behavior and risk assessment

tools being developed at the Rocky Mountain Research Station as well as significant reductions in Southern Research Station projects to support work of the Threat Assessment Centers and the NASA Stennis Space Center to develop early warning systems and predictive modeling for environmental disasters. The majority of transferred funds came from National Forest System and Capital Improvement and Maintenance programs, limiting the agency's ability to perform its basic duty of stewardship of the nation's forests.

The current fire funding situation highlights the long-term need for correcting the way in which fire suppression is budgeted. NASF is committed to working with Congress and the Administration to craft a comprehensive solution. While the need for supplemental wildfire funding drives the issue, it is all too easy to stop there and not work to address the harder issue of finding a budget fix to end this six-year cycle of emergency supplemental funding. We need Congress to look deeper. While passage of the "FLAME Act" (HR 5541) by the House was a positive first step in solving this dilemma, last minute changes to the bill removed a critical provision that designated large catastrophic fires as emergency events to be funded through accounts separate from normal operations. That experience highlighted the jurisdictional complexity of this issue, both in Congress and the Administration. As you approach the close of the 110th Congress, I urge you to provide supplemental funding to the Forest Service and Department of the Interior for wildland firefighting and work with NASF and other partners to achieve a comprehensive and cost-effective solution.

Sincerely,



Kirk Rowdabaugh
President