

Stable, Efficient, Responsible Wildfire Firefighting Funding

SUPPORT A COMPREHENSIVE WILDFIRE FUNDING BILL

*"A comprehensive fix is about good budgeting
and good governance."*



The Challenge

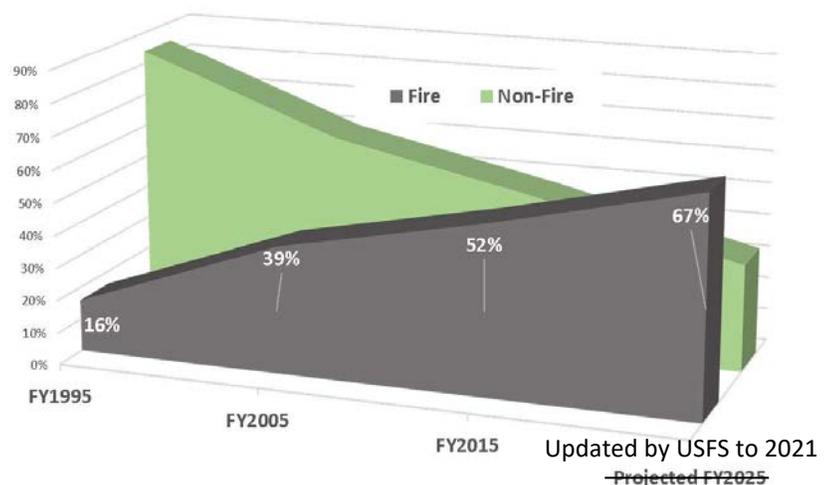
More intense and extreme wildfires, a longer wildfire season, and people moving closer to fire-prone forests are driving an increase in firefighting costs. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) are solely responsible for federal firefighting. However, the funding mechanism to calculate suppression levels increases over time, chipping away at other public lands programs. And yet, those increased levels are still insufficient, forcing agencies to transfer, or “borrow”, funding from programs, chipping away once again at programs that help to maintain our public lands.

These cuts lead to decreased budgets for many important programs such as the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and even Forest Service projects aimed at decreasing the severity of wildfires in the first place. This unstable method of funding suppression has grave impacts on land management agencies and their ability to meet their mission goals.

Fire Suppression by the Numbers

- In 1995, fire management accounted for 16% of the USFS budget; today it is more than half. At the current rate, it is expected to make up two-thirds of the agency's budget by 2025 (USFS updated 9/26/17).
- USFS and DOI have run short on fire-fighting funding **thirteen** times since 2002.
- USFS transferred **eleven** times since 2002; \$600 million in September 2017.
- 2015 was one of the costliest seasons on record, amounting to \$2.6 billion. But 2017 may beat the record.

WILDFIRE FUNDING SHIFT IN US FOREST SERVICE



Broad, Bipartisan Support

There is broad and bipartisan support for a comprehensive fire funding solution:

- Hundreds of organizations representing a diverse range of interests support a comprehensive fix, including conservation, sportsmen, timber, tribal, governmental and recreation groups.
- In the last congressional session, there were more than 150 bipartisan and bicameral members cosponsoring the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, a comprehensive solution. It was analyzed as the most bipartisan bill in the 114th Congress.

The Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue shares the same concern and committed to the same solution:

Secretary Perdue is *“committed to finding a solution that addresses the growth of fire programs as a percent of the Agency’s budget, and also ends the practice of transferring funds from non-fire programs when suppression funds fall short before the end of the fiscal year.”* June 6, 2017 Letter to the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions

What a Comprehensive Fix Should Do:

- 1) Address the erosion of non-fire program funding that results from increasing suppression costs – stabilize suppression funding in way that leaves other programs intact.
- 2) Access disaster funding – creating a process for funding the 1-2% of costly wildfires like earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes.
- 3) Significantly reduce the need to transfer or “borrow” – once wildfire suppression is funding more accurately and from disaster funding, the need to transfer would inevitably be reduced.

Comprehensive Fire Funding Solutions in the 115th Congress

House and Senate – Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFa); HR 2862, S 1842

WDFa would amend the Budget Control Act allowing wildfire suppression expenditures in excess of the 2015 ten-year average to qualify for disaster funding through a budget cap adjustment.

- Starting with a cap of \$1.41 billion; administration request and appropriations allocation to be under the cap level.
- Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior are required to request any levels beyond what is appropriated and/or above the capped level, or revert to transferring funds from non-suppression accounts.

Senate – Section 102 of the National Flood Insurance Program Act (Sec. 102); S 1571

Sec. 102 would amend the Stafford Act by allowing access to the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) for wildfire suppression expenditures above 70% of the ten-year average.

- Requires a presidential declaration, allows for a declaration for a lump sum, to minimize multiple declarations.
- Capped at \$1.647 billion. Total transfers from the DRF not to exceed this level for wildfire suppression.
- Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior are required to request levels above the capped level.
- Transfers are banned

For information regarding this factsheet or the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions, please contact Cecilia Clavet, cclavet@mc.org, 703-841-7425.