

PARTNER CAUCUS on FIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING SOLUTIONS

TALKING POINTS: FIRE FUNDING

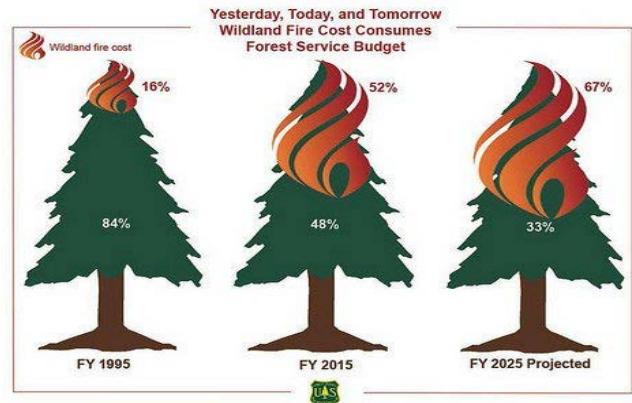
Request to Congress:

- 1) House: Cosponsor the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, H.R. 2862
- 2) Senate: Support a comprehensive fire funding solution this year, WDFA (S.1842), Sec. 102

A COMPREHENSIVE FIRE FIX:

A NATIONWIDE PROBLEM

- While wildfires are seen predominantly as a “western” issue, the *impacts are national*. As more funding goes to suppression, less is available for land management programs...programs that benefit forests all over the US.
- All agencies and/or programs funded through the Interior appropriations bill, including the Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish & Wildlife Service, among others, are at risk of funding reduction or elimination because of increasing suppression costs, and at risk of having funds transferred when suppression dollars run out. (Refer to [USDA's Fire Transfer Impact by State](#) for US Forest Service examples of transfers/“borrowing” in FY2012 and FY2013).
- 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. (see graphic)
- This dramatic shift from fire to non-fire programs, results in less for those conservation programs [your organization] cares about, like forest restoration, wildlife, etc. (pick one that resonates with the member).
- Wildfire suppression is more expensive than wildfire prevention. Additional dollars that are reinvested in prevention programs, which are proven to be 90% effective, will mitigate the costs associated with the extremely expensive, and dangerous, process of wildfire suppression.
- Some wildfires are disasters, and should be funded similarly to other natural disasters, like hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes.
- Since 2002, appropriated levels for suppression did not meet the funding needs *twelve times* and transfers occurred *eleven times*.
- In the last three years, Congress has allocated levels above the 10-yr average (thank you to members on appropriations). However, we still need a comprehensive and permanent solution.



RESPONSIBLE AND STABLE BUDGETING

- Land management agencies are in urgent need of *responsible budgeting* that ensures first responders have the up-front resources available for wildfire suppression; and *stable budgeting* that ensures agencies and programs can accomplish their land management goals.

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- agency budgets that results from the increasing suppression costs, 2) accesses disaster funding for extraordinarily costly fires and 3) significantly reduces the need to “borrow” from non-suppression accounts and programs.
- Fund costly wildfire events like other natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes.

THE WILDFIRE DISASTER FUNDING ACT, HR 2862/S 1842

- For the first time, WDFA would develop suppression funding processes for the USFS and DOI that would access disaster funding.
- WDFA is a comprehensive fix for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) agencies that would ensure increasing suppression costs don't occur at the expense of all the other agencies and programs.
- WDFA will not increase spending and deficits: The spending and deficit agreement continues the mechanisms put in place in the Budget Control Act that set out certain categories of spending—such as disaster relief—for which the budget caps can be adjusted by specified amounts. The bipartisan WDFA would add a new category of spending for wildfire suppression that could qualify for adjusting the discretionary caps upward.
- Wildfire suppression will be stabilized at the FY2015 10-year average. And, the costliest wildfires would be funded through a budget cap adjustment, similar to FEMA's process for funding other natural disasters.
- The Interior appropriations bill would continue to fund non-disaster wildfire suppression activities.

SEC. 102 FLOOD INSURANCE BILL (S 1571): WILDFIRE ON FEDERAL LANDS

- Meets all the criteria for a comprehensive fire funding fix for USFS and DOI agencies that would ensure increasing suppression costs would not occur at the expense of all the other agencies and programs.
- Similar to WDFA but uses a Stafford Act approach instead of the budget cap approach.
 - would allow access to the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF); the calculation for the fund would adjust to include wildfire suppression.
 - Interior appropriation bill is still responsible for funding 70% of the ten-year average for suppression and ensure that the remaining 30% be allocated to activities that improve fire regime and restoration/resiliency activities – this ensures funding stays with USFS and DOI.
 - Wildfires in excess of 70 percent of the ten-year average qualify to access the DRF, up to \$1.647 billion –total transfers from the DRF not to exceed this level.
 - Requires a presidential declaration, but written in a way that would allow for a declaration for a lump sum as opposed to for each wildfire – this avoids excessive amount of declarations.
 - Secretary would make a congressional request for levels above \$1.647 billion.
 - Transfers are banned.
- Sec. 102 is likely to have a similar CBO score to the House's Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFA; HR 2962), which would not increase spending and deficits: The spending and deficit agreement continues the mechanisms put in place in the Budget Control Act that set out certain categories of spending—such as disaster relief—for which the budget caps can be adjusted by specified amounts.
- We understand concern about the disaster cap calculation and the shrinking disaster cap, however, as that problem gets resolved, the wildfire suppression problem must be part of that solution. Some wildfires are disasters that should have access to the same funding as other disaster events.