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February 1, 2019

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Honorable Bruce Westerman
209 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Westerman:

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) thanks you for your editorial concerning the importance of passing annual appropriations bills by September 30th of each year (January 25, 2019, *The Hill*).

Following the regular order for passing the annual appropriations bill for the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies would be of great help to the Forest Service and its partners. A series of short-term continuing resolutions (CRs) play havoc with efficient work planning and management of the national forests. They create substantial uncertainties about policies and funding levels for programs and activities.

For example, late autumn and overwinter are important times to begin the seasonal hiring process, for conducting fuels reduction activities to reduce wildfire risks, training fire fighters and other technical specialists, and maintaining equipment and roads nation-wide.

The first four months of a new fiscal year are also the prime times for developing and bidding contracts for work to be done during the rest of the fiscal year. For example, overwinter is a critical time for tree-planting and prescribed burning in southern forests; work typically done by contract planting crews who submit bids in October and November and start work in December and January. The uncertainties created by CRs make it difficult for the Forest Service to wisely and efficiently solicit bids, award contracts, and schedule the work of its employees and contractors. When passage of a final appropriations bill is delayed until four or five months into the new fiscal year, valuable time is lost for adapting to new policy direction and efficiently planning and doing work. That puts forest resources at risk.

Uncertainties about Forest Service funding levels also affect agency partnerships with state forestry agencies and universities. Delayed appropriations delay Forest Service grants to states and cities to combat forest pests and strain the federal-state partnerships essential to

doing forest inventory and monitoring work. Delays in finalizing appropriations also result in delays in filling vacant positions and in cooperative research with universities. Both affect the Forest Service's capacity to get work done to protect and manage forest health and productivity on both public and private lands.

NAFSR appreciates your leadership in calling attention to the importance of following regular order in the annual appropriations process. We are ready to work with you and members of the Subcommittees on Appropriations for the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to pass the bill for FY 2020 following regular order. The work of the Forest Service and its partners has been hampered by repeated recent delays in final appropriations. Our nation's forests are too important to risk the uncertainties and lost opportunities created by successive short term CRs.

Sincerely,

James L. Caswell

James L. Caswell, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees