

November 20, 2017

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan  
Speaker of the House  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Wildfire Funding Fix

Dear Mr. Speaker, Leader McConnell, Leader Pelosi and Leader Schumer;

We write to express our concerns with the growing issue of federal wildland fire suppression costs, and the corresponding impacts to all other Forest Service programs areas, including those programs that support our rural communities and economy. Collectively, we represent three of the top four most heavily forested states in the nation, where forests play an integral part of our social, environmental, and economic well-being.

As we write this letter, we are already well in excess of \$2.3 billion in wildland firefighting costs, making it one of the most expensive years on record. These record years are becoming the new norm, and repeatedly have surpassed the available funding for suppression in the Forest Service budget. What constituted approximately 16% of the Forest Service budget in the mid-nineties, fire suppression now accounts for over 50%. The irony of this issue is funding that would otherwise be used to prevent and mitigate the damages from these wildfires is having to be diverted to pay for suppression, thus creating a self-perpetuating spiral.

This is far from just a "Western" issue. Instead, the deterioration of the non-fire Forest Service budget to pay for fire suppression is a problem that impacts all of us, including our two northern New England states we represent. We provide the following examples:

- The White Mountain National Forest, located in New Hampshire and western Maine, is a key driver in the regional tourism economy, seeing six million visitors each year. Their recreation budget has declined approximately 5% each year over the last seven, while the trails budget alone has decreased 34% just in the last two years.
- The Green Mountain National Forest, located in Vermont, has seen an approximate 5% reduction in its recreation budget over the last several years, leaving enhancement and maintenance projects at a standstill.
- All of our state forestry agencies utilize funding provided by the USFS State and Private Forestry Programs. These programs protect our regions forest health, provide fire protection on private and state lands, support private landowners in the management of their forests, and provide

technical expertise to communities. The continued shift in the Forest Service budget means less funding available to support these important programs which in turn support our rural communities. Program funding has been significantly reduced over the past decade as wildfire suppression has subsumed the agency's budget. USDA recently provided a projection which indicated that if wildfire suppression expenditure trends continue, these critical programs will be funded at a small fraction of current levels.

We believe there is a solution, and we believe the time to act is now. First, the erosion of non-fire program funding resulting from increased suppression costs needs to change, and suppression funding needs to stabilize. Second, the largest and costliest of the wildfires should be funded like hurricanes, earthquakes, and other costly natural disasters, not from the agency's operating budget. Third, we need to take a close look at federal forest management reform, and work together on ways to mitigate and lessen the impacts from wildfires.

In closing, we urge Congress to fix this issue now, before yet another record year for wildfires comes to fruition and strips the funding so necessary for the prudent management of our federal, state and private forests.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu  
Governor  
State of New Hampshire



Phil Scott  
Governor  
State of Vermont

CC:  
Secretary Sonny Perdue  
Chief Tony Tooke