**Northwest Public Power Association**

**Resolution 2017‐15**

**Ensuring Adequate Federal Funds to Combat Catastrophic Wildfires**

**Background**

Fires in the West have had a devastating impact on natural resources, property, and lives—including public power facilities and employees. Generating units, transmission and distribution lines, communications equipment, and utility buildings have been adversely affected by recent fires. The significant carbon emissions of fires – from burning vegetation and damaged trees left to decay, accounting for roughly one-fifth of total man-made emissions – also undermine utility efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Under federal law, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior forecast fire suppression budgets based on an average of the past ten years’ spending. When budgeted funds are inadequate, as frequently occurs, the agencies take funds from other accounts—including funds that are needed for forest management to prevent future fires as well as funds needed to properly restore the forest after a fire. This funding scheme is deeply flawed: the cycle of “fire‐borrowing” denies the agencies of critical funds needed to maintain healthy forests and leads to more devastating fires and continued depletion of forest management funds.

Federal wildfire management needs to be overhauled to boost funding, prevent the raiding of needed fire prevention funds, and treat the most devastating fires as natural disasters.  Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in Congress to ensure adequate and equitable funding for major fires. Under this legislation, catastrophic fires would be funded under a separate disaster account—just like funding for all other catastrophic natural disasters. Any fire suppression spending above 70% of the 10‐year average for fire suppression would be eligible for disaster funding, with the remaining funding secured through appropriations.

Removing these mega‐fires from the regular budget will free up substantial new funding for fire prevention and hazardous fuels reduction projects that can help break the cycle of increasingly  dangerous and costly fires.

**NWPPA Position:**

* NWPPA supports swift enactment of legislation, or regulatory action, to establish wildfire funding mechanisms to ensure adequate and equitable funding to prevent and fight major forest fires.

Origination Date: 2016. Revised 2017.