Northwest Public Power Association
Resolution 2019-15
Ensuring Adequate Federal Funds to Combat and Prevent 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. The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates the total economic cost to communities caused by the 2018 wildfire season alone to be upwards of $350 billion.

Legislation was enacted in 2018 to end the practice of fire-borrowing by establishing an emergency reserve account that the Forest Service can draw from instead of borrowing from non-fire programs. However, this funding fix does not take effect until 2020. As a result, Congress must be prepared to swiftly approve supplemental appropriations for suppression costs to ensure other forest health programs are not raided yet again if 2019’s fire season proves as severe as recent years.

Additionally, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior has the responsibility under federal law to ensure the health of federal forest and range land. Yet, there are numerous stands of timber and range land that suffer from disease or bug infestation. Once a fire is started where there is an abundance of dry or dead natural fuel, public power utilities are subject to infrastructure destruction as well as reliability and personnel risk related to wildfires on federal lands.

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.
• NWPPA supports swift enactment of legislation, or regulatory action, to establish aggressive management of forests suffering from disease or bug infestation where electric infrastructure is also nearby or present.