



Wildfire Disaster Funding

August 2017

Key Messages:

- NWPPA supports legislation to change how the federal government budgets for wildfire suppression, eliminating the need to transfer funds from critical forest conservation and management programs.

Background:

Federal fire suppression spending has increased substantially over the past 20 years—in the mid 1980's, 70 percent of the USFS' budget was dedicated to managing the national forests. Today, that number is 30 percent. Fire costs now consume nearly 50% of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) budget, limiting the agency's ability to invest in land management activities.

The USFS has transferred funds from non-fire accounts to pay for fire suppression eight times since 2002 – a total of \$3.4 billion. The USFS' "fire borrowing" was intended to be an extraordinary measure, but as fire seasons have grown more destructive, it has become common practice—and has created a devastating cycle that prevents agencies from doing needed hazardous fuels removal or timber harvests, leading to even worse fire seasons.

Such transfers have long-lasting negative impacts on forest management. Transfers halt important land management activities that could help reduce long-term fire risk; and the timing of the transfers – at the end of the federal fiscal year and height of the fire seasons – magnifies the impact on the ability to accomplish program objectives on federal and private lands alike.

"The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act" by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) would fix the way the federal government currently budget for wildfire suppression, by treating catastrophic wildfires like similar natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes. Routine firefighting costs, which make up about 70 percent of the cost of wildfire suppression, would be funded through the normal budgeting and appropriations process. The true emergency fire events, which represent about one percent of wildfires but make up 30 percent of costs, would be treated like similar major natural disasters and funded under disaster programs.