



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

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

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

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Office of the Democratic Leader  
The Capitol, H-204  
Washington, D.C. 20515

December 13, 2017

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Democratic Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of our more than seven million members and supporters, The Nature Conservancy, the National Wildlife Federation and American Forests ask you to pass a comprehensive wildfire funding solution before the end of this year. We will only support the inclusion of a *comprehensive* wildfire suppression funding solution in any end-of-year package that addresses the erosion of federal agency budgets due to increasing wildfire suppression costs, in addition to addressing “borrowing” and accessing disaster funding. Additionally, any forest management proposals that may be tied to wildfire funding must be bipartisan and focused on restoration.

Increased costs of wildfire response in the United States have created a crippling burden on the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service’s land management functions as they shift resources to fund essential suppression activities. Funding used to fight wildfire disasters could instead be used to improve forest resilience and reduce wildfire risk. More than 50 percent of the U.S. Forest Service’s budget is now dedicated to fire, and this trend is expected to get worse as landscape management is stalled across all lands, including national forests and DOI lands such as our national parks, and state and private lands. According to recent USDA reports, fighting wildfires will make up two-thirds of the Forest Service’s budget by FY2021.

Proposals in past years would ban the practice of transferring additional funds when appropriated funding is spent, but that is only a partial fix in addressing the impacts from rising wildland firefighting costs. These proposals do not address the larger problem of wildfire suppression costs consuming greater portions of the U.S. Forest Service budget over time. As the 10-year average that is used to calculate suppression costs increases, and as budgets remain relatively flat, funding is being shifted from non-fire programs to pay for fire suppression. This results in fewer and fewer dollars for forest management and restoration, research, recreation, and other critical private and public land objectives.

A comprehensive fire funding fix would 1) most importantly, address the continued erosion of agency budgets that results from the increasing 10-year average, and stabilize the level of funding for suppression within the agencies; 2) access disaster funding for extraordinarily costly fires; and 3) significantly reduce

the need to transfer from non-suppression accounts and programs. Addressing the budget erosion problem offers agencies and land managers more predictable and consistent budgets as they try to implement and execute successful programs and projects that benefits forests and communities across the United States.

As the House and Senate work towards a comprehensive wildfire funding solution that we understand will include forest management provisions, we urge you to prioritize bipartisan, moderate forest management proposals focused on restoration that is collaborative and based in science. Through decades of on-the-ground work in a wide variety of forest landscapes around the country, we believe that a sound and successful wildfire and forest management policy requires a holistic approach to management, collaboration, increase pace and scale, ecological consideration, active management, environmental protections, and the role of fire in forest management. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these principles with you, in addition to putting them into legislative context.

The Nature Conservancy, the National Wildlife Federation and American Forests ask you to enact a *comprehensive* wildfire suppression funding solution urgently for the safety of our communities, healthy public lands and local economies that depend upon them. Every year that goes by without a solution increases costs and risk, and there is bipartisan agreement that Congress must fix this problem. It is imperative that Congress act by the end of this year to solve this critical issue, and we stand ready to work with Congress toward this goal.

Sincerely,

Mark Tercek  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Nature Conservancy

Collin O'Mara  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
The National Wildlife Federation

Scott Steen  
President & CEO  
American Forests

CC: Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; House Committee on Natural Resources; Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works; Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; House Committee on Agriculture; Senate Committee on Appropriations; House Committee on Appropriations; Senate Committee on the Budget; House Committee on the Budget