

September 15, 2008

Chairman David R. Obey
House Appropriations Committee
The Capitol
Room H-218
Washington, DC 20515-6015

Representative Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
The Capitol
Room H-218
Washington, DC 20515-6015

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

We, the undersigned, urge you to provide emergency supplemental appropriations to cover US Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) wildland fire operations costs above originally appropriated amounts. In the absence of adequate firefighting funding, the USFS has been forced to move \$400 million from non-fire accounts to support fire suppression efforts. This has disrupted or completely stopped many important programs, projects and cooperative agreements benefiting public and private forests, including forest management, wildlife habitat, conservation, and research activities, many of which help prevent or minimize wildfires. This has eroded agency partnerships and credibility with communities and organizations that help it accomplish its goals.

To date, the USFS and DOI combined have spent over \$1.3 billion on fire suppression activities, controlling wildfires on over 4.6 million acres. As you are aware, the 2008 wildfire season in California began much earlier and proceeded with greater intensity than it had in previous years. This increased and prolonged wildfire activity, along with large fires in North Carolina and across the Southwest, has once again strained USFS and DOI finances. Now that we are in the midst of a very active hurricane season, we will likely see an increased need for supplemental funding as USFS takes on greater responsibility for hurricane response and recovery efforts.

The current fire funding crisis underscores the importance of developing a long-term solution to correct the way in which fire suppression funds are budgeted. We urge Congress to provide these supplemental funds to prevent further short-term financial damage, and at the same time, address the more challenging issue of finding a budget fix to end this six-year cycle of emergency supplemental funding. We are committed to working with Congress and the Administration to craft a comprehensive solution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Community Trees
American Fisheries Society
American Forests
American Forest Foundation
American Forest & Paper Association
American Forest Resource Council
American Hiking Society
Appalachian Mountain Club
Association of Consulting Foresters
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
Black Hills Regional Multiple Use Coalition
Campfire Club of America
Colorado Forestry Association
Colorado Timber Industry Association
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Dale Bosworth, Former US Forest Service Chief
Dale Robertson, Former US Forest Service Chief
Ecological Society of America
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Idaho Conservation League
Intermountain Forest Association
Jack Ward Thomas, Former US Forest Service Chief
Meeteetse Conservation District
Mike Dombeck, Former US Forest Service Chief
Mississippi Land Trust
Moosalamoo Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
Northern Forest Alliance
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Public Lands Council
Quail Unlimited
Ruffed Grouse Society
Society for Range Management
Society of American Foresters
Sustainable Northwest
The Nature Conservancy
The Pacific Forest Trust
Trout Unlimited
Trust for Public Lands
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
Vermont Woodlands Association
Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association
Vermont Youth Conservation Corps
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Mississippi
The Wildlife Society
Wyoming Timber Industry Association