



Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF)
Arthur 'Butch' Blazer
New Mexico State Forester and
CWSF Chair

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Written Public Testimony on Fire Funding
March 19, 2009

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF). The CWSF is comprised of the seventeen State Foresters and six Territorial Foresters in the Western U.S. The mission of the CWSF is to promote science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests.

Request

We request the members of the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies reaffirm their commitment to the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and Department of the Interior (DOI) FLAME funds and ensure they are funded at appropriate levels that would cover the cost of emergency fires and eliminate the need to transfer funds from non-fire programs. The CWSF recommends that rather than creating four separate accounts for 'emergency' wildland fire suppression activities as proposed in the President's FY2011 budget, the proposed funding in the Forest Service and DOI contingency reserve accounts be transferred to their respective FLAME funds. Additionally, Congress must continue to encourage the Forest Service of the need to replace the 10-year rolling average estimate with a more predictive statistical modeling approach for calculating emergency and annual suppression estimates.

We are encouraged to see the Administration's attention to this important issue and a commitment to find a solution. However, the current budget proposal creates an obstacle to the progress thus far. The President's budget proposal for FY2011 includes not only the FLAME Funds for each of the agencies but also a Wildland Fire Contingency Reserve for each agency, as referenced above. These Reserves are accessible only after the 'regular' suppression dollars and the FLAME Funds have been exhausted and require a Presidential declaration to be accessed. These Contingency Reserves are duplicative of the FLAME funds and take away from the potential of what the FLAME funds were intended to do. The FLAME Act already addresses the funding issue by partitioning the wildland fire suppression account and detailing how the accounts should be funded and managed. Funding for the Contingency Reserves should instead be included in the FLAME funds and spent using the congressionally-approved process established in the FLAME Act.

Background

The CWSF is a member of the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Spending Solutions (Partner Caucus) – a unique and diverse group of organizations dedicated to finding a new, improved

2850 Youngfield Street, Lakewood, Colorado 80215
Phone (303) 445-4362 FAX (303) 239-3811

mechanism for funding emergency fire suppression activities for the Forest Service and DOI land management agencies. Assembled in early 2009, the Partner Caucus includes leading industry, environmental, outdoor recreation, and forestry organizations that all recognize the

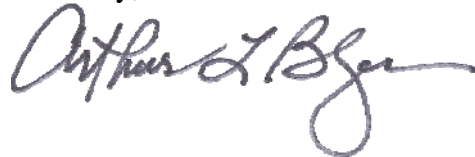
urgency of this problem. Attached to this testimony is the Partner Caucus' principles and recommendations document that includes a complete list of supportive organizations. The Partner Caucus was created to bring attention to the imperative need to release the stranglehold that emergency suppression costs are having on the agencies' budget and programs, and the resulting negative economic and environmental impacts.

As a result of the Partner Caucus' outreach and work on this issue, in 2009 Congress passed the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act (FLAME Act), established two funds, one for the Forest Service and another for DOI. Congress included specific instructions that FLAME should be funded with improved estimates and not at the expense of other agency programs. In FY2010, the Forest Service received \$413 million and DOI received \$75 million for their respective FLAME funds.

Summary

We are grateful for the commitment to address the increasing cost of fire suppression and the impacts on important non-fire programs. The CWSF supports whole and healthy FLAME Funds for the Forest Service and DOI coupled with adequately funded suppression budgets as important components of the solution to our nation's fire suppression funding problem.

Sincerely,



Arthur 'Butch' Blazer
New Mexico State Forester and
Council of Western State Foresters, Chair