

COUNCIL OF WESTERN STATE FORESTERS
John C. Maisch, Alaska State Forester and Chair, Council of Western State Foresters
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Written Public Testimony on Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations Recommendations
March 28, 2011

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.

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, the CWSF appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony on the proposed fiscal year (FY) 2012 USDA Forest Service (USFS) Budget related to funding for the State Fire Assistance (SFA) program and on the Department of the Interior (DOI) Budget related to funding for the Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) program. Additionally, the CWSF appreciates this opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Wildfire Suppression Reserve Funds established under the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act within the USFS and DOI budgets in FY 2012. The CWSF recommends that the FY 2012 budget fund these priority programs as follows:

- **State Fire Assistance: \$110 million (\$39 million within the State & Private Forestry appropriation and \$71 million within the Wildland Fire Management appropriation)**
- **Rural Fire Assistance: \$7 million**
- **USFS FLAME account: \$413 million**
- **DOI FLAME account: \$92 million**

The CWSF supports the National Association of State Forester's FY 2012 Appropriations Recommendation Testimony that has been submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Ensuring appropriate funding for SFA, RFA and the FLAME accounts is a priority in the West. These programs provide critically important resources needed to equip first responders and to address the growing threat of wildland fire in response to the heavy accumulation of fuels in many western forests and the large number of fire-prone communities and homes at high risk within the wildland-urban interface. Funding these programs provides necessary resources to equip local agencies to protect human life and property, enables local communities to better prepare for wildland fires and also ensures that other federal, non-fire programs will not be negatively impacted by the cost of suppressing emergency wildland fires.

Background

Because of the impact of wildland fire in the West to communities, forest resources and budgets, the CWSF has been an active participant in the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Spending Solutions (Partner Caucus). The Partner Caucus is comprised of a unique group of organizations, including leading industry, environmental, outdoor recreation, and forestry organizations that worked to find new and improved mechanisms to fund emergency fire

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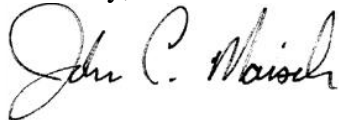
suppression within the USFS and the DOI. This group was instrumental in building support for changing the way we fund fire suppression, which ultimately led to the passage of the FLAME Act by Congress in 2009. The FLAME Act established two funds, one each for the USFS and the DOI, to cover emergency wildland fire suppression costs. Congress was clear that the intent of the FLAME Act was to eliminate the need to transfer funds from non-fire accounts to fund emergency wildland fires, and further, that FLAME funding should not come at the expense of other agency programs.

Programs like RFA within the DOI and SFA within the USFS provide critical resources to local communities to equip and train first responders and engage in wildland fire mitigation activities. For example, the SFA program supports the preparation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans, which serve as a guide to fuels mitigation work and help fire-prone communities protect life and property. These programs leverage federal dollars to enhance the critically important wildland fire protection capabilities of communities and fire districts throughout the West. By assisting first responders with training, purchasing necessary suppression, communications and safety equipment and conducting prevention activities, these programs help ensure a safe, quick and efficient response to wildland fires, which in turn helps reduce suppression costs by reducing the number of large wildland fires.

Summary

We are grateful for the efforts and support of Congress to address the many issues surrounding the increasing cost of suppressing wildland fires. For the reasons outlined above, the CWSF supports whole and healthy FLAME accounts within the DOI and USFS along with funding for the SFA and RFA programs. These programs are all critically necessary components of a solution to our nation's wildland fire suppression funding problem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John C. Maisch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John C. Maisch
Alaska State Forester and
Chair, Council of Western State Foresters