

PARTNER CAUCUS on FIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING SOLUTIONS

For Immediate Release

Contact: Heather Layman, The Nature Conservancy, 703-841-3929 or hlayman@tnc.org

Bipartisan Fix to Wildfire Disaster Funding Burns Out

December 9, 2016 (Arlington, Va.) — With the bipartisan energy bill now stalled in Congress, time has run out for a permanent and comprehensive fire funding solution to be enacted this year. A fire funding fix was included in the most final drafts of the energy bill, but the House of Representatives concluded its business for the year without acting on the bill.

The Fire Suppression Funding Solutions Partner Caucus, a diverse set of international, national, tribal, and local organizations interested in sustainable land management, strongly supported a fire funding fix and hoped to see it passed through this Congress. Last month, [groups signed a letter asking House and Senate leaders to ensure a comprehensive fire funding solution](#).

“Congress let an incredible opportunity to fix the fire funding problem slip through its fingers by not acting on the energy bill this year,” **said Cecilia Clavet of The Nature Conservancy, on behalf of the Fire Suppression Funding Solutions Partner Caucus.** “The lack of a funding solution will continue the negative effects to all other programs funded through the Interior appropriations bill. We are indebted to all the members of the House and Senate who supported a fire funding fix, and are especially grateful for the efforts and commitment of Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell. In getting us closer this year, we hope we can get to a final point of success in the next Congress.”

“This problem of rising suppression costs stripping resources from non-fire programs is not going away, and we are eager to continue efforts to solve this problem in the next Congress,” concluded Clavet. “The incredibly broad spectrum of groups supporting this legislation clearly demonstrates this is not a partisan issue, but one that affects the health of people, water, and wildlife.”

Quotes from some of the many organizations that support solving the fire funding problem:

“We have an opportunity to put rural America and our rural forested lands to work, including the over one-third of our forests that are owned by rural families. In doing so, we can reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and provide the many benefits we all enjoy from these lands,” **said Tom Martin, President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation.** “Unfortunately, if wildfire fighting costs continue to consume the US Forest Service and Department of the Interior budgets, we won’t have the tools to act on these opportunities.”

“Once again, we are extremely disappointed that Congress did not pass a fire suppression funding fix,” **said Rebecca Turner, Senior Director of Programs and Policy at American Forests.** “With bipartisan support there is no excuse why this serious issue has not been solved.”

“For almost a decade, a diverse coalition has advocated for reform in the way wildfire suppression is paid for, citing the serious damage to natural resource programs, many of which, if adequately funded, would

MORE

reduce the catastrophic impacts of such fires,” **said James L Caswell, Chairman of the Board at the National Association of Forest Service Retirees.** “It is astounding that over this time Congress was not able to find a solution, despite these best efforts. As a result, America’s rural communities continue to be threatened by the failure of Congress to come to agreement. As we look to the new year, we hope the 115th Congress will recognize that solving this problem will protect lives, help to restore forests, increase employment in forest dependent and adjacent communities, and take the next step to enactment. We need to get this fixed!”

“The National Association of State Foresters is disappointed that Congress missed an opportunity to address wildfire funding challenges this year. However, we recognize that there is more bipartisan support than ever before for a resolution. In order to conserve, protect and enhance America’s forests, leaders in Congress must address this challenge before the spring wildfire season begins,” **said Bill Crapsler, Wyoming State Forester and President of the National Association of State Foresters.**

“On behalf of outdoor businesses and our partners, we are disappointed that Congress did not take action again this year to permanently fix the way wildfires are budgeted,” **said Jessica Wahl, Government Affairs Manager, Outdoor Industry Association.** “Outdoor recreation is a \$646 billion economy that relies on funding and infrastructure for recreation assets. Hotter and longer fire seasons have forced agencies to borrow funds year after year. This cuts into programs that get youth outside, employ Americans in gateway communities and contribute to the national economy.”

“We’re disappointed that once again a clean solution to fix fire funding and stop fire borrowing was passed up this Congress,” **said Athan Manuel, director of the Sierra Club's Land Protection campaign.** “The longer this issue goes unaddressed, the greater the risks to our communities and our forests. We thank the many members who have worked across party lines to create this solution and we are committed to continuing to work with them to fix this serious problem.”

“Thank you to the many members of Congress who worked so diligently to explore opportunities to address the wildfire funding problem this year,” **said Clark Seely, President of the Society of American Foresters.** While disappointed that an agreement was not reached, we are ready to roll up our sleeves and work with Congress and the new Administration on a comprehensive budgetary fix that enables federal land management agencies to spend their valuable time and resources achieving management goals rather than planning for how and when money will be diverted to the ever-growing wildfire suppression budget.”

“Once again, we are extremely disappointed about the inability of Congress to pass meaningful fire funding reform,” **said Dylan Kruse, Policy Director at Sustainable Northwest.** “The need is clear, the solution is bipartisan, and the support for a fix is unprecedented. We urge our leaders to make this a top priority in the next Congress and do right by the people and landscapes desperately waiting for resolution.”

###