

January 15, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

As the lost homes and lives from last year's wildfires sadly reminded us, we are experiencing longer, hotter and more devastating fire seasons. This past fire season registered as the costliest in history, with over 58,000 wildfires on 9.3 million acres of federal, state, tribal and private lands. This was not an anomaly. Our nation's forests are in crisis. On the national forests, current data is showing that around 80 million acres are at high risk of catastrophic fire with potential impacts to over 70,000 communities. The unprecedented levels of insect and disease epidemics, combined with extended drought and climate change have caused tree mortality at the highest levels in recorded history. In California alone in the last few years, we've lost over 100 million trees. So it is clear, the trend of more and larger catastrophic fires is going to continue indefinitely unless and until we get much more aggressive at managing our forests, using all available tools such as prescribed fire, timber harvesting, managed natural wildfires and precommercial thinning. Research and science have demonstrated that 90% of preventive fuel treatments are effective in changing the fire behavior and/or helping with control of the wildfire. We simply need to do more proactive forest management.

Unfortunately, the ability of the Forest Service to ramp up preventative forest treatments on national forests, and to assist states with their forest health management, is being impacted by the increasing cost of firefighting and the archaic 10-year average method being used to fund fire suppression. The Department of the Interior and to a much greater degree the Forest Service are the only government entities required to pay for catastrophic emergency operations out of their regular appropriated budgets. Today the Forest Service spends over half of its budget on fire management activities, compared to 16% in 1995. In a 2015 report, the Forest Service projected the fire budget would consume two thirds of the agency's budget by 2025. Conditions on the ground are worsening and the agency is now projecting the fire budget to consume two thirds of the overall budget four years sooner in 2021. In the last two decades, the number of national forest employees has dropped from 19,000 to 11,000, while the number of firefighters has more than doubled. This is crippling the agency's efforts to increase critical management activities.

For these reasons, we ask you to pass a comprehensive fire funding fix. We cannot waste this rare opportunity. Active management of our nation's forests is crucial, not only for providing jobs and prosperity to rural communities, but for providing clean water, abundant wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and all the other amenities that come from well managed forests. The National

Governors Association, Western Governors Association, the National Association of State Foresters and over 200 conservation, timber, wildlife, recreation and sportsmen's organizations have all expressed strong support for a comprehensive fire funding fix. If not now, when? The future of our forests is in your hands.

/s/ R. Max Peterson
Chief, Forest Service
1979-1987

/s/ F. Dale Robertson
Chief, Forest Service
1987-1993

/s/ Michael P. Dombeck
Chief, Forest Service
1997-2001

/s/ Dale N. Bosworth
Chief, Forest Service
2001-2007

/s/ Abigail R. Kimball
Chief, Forest Service
2007-2009

/s/ Thomas L. Tidwell
Chief, Forest Service
2009-2017