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Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

Dear Chairman Senator Murkowski,

Thank you for soliciting comments on the Wildfire Budgeting, Response and Forest Management Act "discussion draft." We applaud the Committee's efforts to resolve the current unacceptable wildfire suppression funding situation facing the Forest Service and Department of the Interior. The legislation currently being considered by the Committee is a very significant step in the right direction.

With only one significant reservation, the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) strongly support this legislation. The legislation ends the fire "borrowing" process once and for all. Forestry reforms that encourage the use of collaboration and the limiting of required alternatives for certain environmental assessments are positive changes. The authority to use excess wildfire suppression funds in "low fire years" is an excellent method of encouraging internal cost management. These steps will increase overall agency efficiency in executing on-the-ground restoration projects, and the curtailment of fire borrowing will finally bring needed stability to agency operations.

However, we are very concerned that the proposed legislation omits a key aspect of wildfire suppression funding reform that was envisioned in the original proposed Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFA). By retaining the process of funding the 10-year average within discretionary funds, the annually increasing erosion of core natural resource programs will continue. The reality is that there has never been sufficient funding for the programs that will restore America's public lands to a healthy state that can prevent the devastating effects of catastrophic wildfire. We urge the Committee to include the "70/30" funding process envisioned in WDFA, or the use of a different funding process for large wildfires that will serve to reduce the amount of wildfire suppression funding that must be requested and funded within the discretionary budgeting process.

I want to again thank the Committee for providing the opportunity to comment on this proposed legislation. NAFSR is happy to provide further assistance as the Committee might desire.

Sincerely,

/s/ James L. Caswell
James L. Caswell, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees