

# WILDFIRE

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HEARING  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION  
ON  
WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS AND FOREST SERVICE 2015 FISCAL  
YEAR BUDGET

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JULY 15, 2014



Printed for the use of the  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

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U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

91-554 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2014

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## **WILDFIRE**

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**TUESDAY, JULY 15, 2014**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m. in room SD-366, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Mary L. Landrieu, chair, presiding.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MARY LANDRIEU, U.S. SENATOR FROM LOUISIANA**

The CHAIR. Good morning, everyone.

Let me welcome you all to our Energy and Natural Resource hearing on wildlife, fire preparedness and the Forest Service budget request.

Let me welcome Senator Feinstein with us this morning.

Senator McCain and Senator Crapo will be joining us very shortly.

I want to thank all the senators for their leadership on this important issue that is so important to so many members of this committee and our Nation.

I also want to thank our witnesses who will follow this distinguished panel for their knowledge and insight.

Today we will explore the Forest Service and the Department of Interior's preparedness for the 2014 wildfire season and to consider the President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget proposal for the Forest Service. Many of our colleagues have sent letters calling for action. Today's hearing is a good opportunity to examine issues related to fire suppression and attempt to glean a deeper understanding of the extent of the problem and possible solutions.

Fighting fires, wildfires, and funding fire suppression efforts have been an important issue in American politics for over 100 years.

For just a brief historical context it was interesting to find that in 1886 Yellowstone's Civilian Superintendent abandoned their post over dispute in pay while fighting 3 large wildfires raged and threatened the Park. The county turned to the fighting men of the U.S. First Calvary under the command of Captain Moses Harris to meet the challenge. Although his men lacked the necessary training to fight wildfires Captain Harris led a successful effort to extinguish the fires and establish the first common sense anti-wildfire rule in our Nation's parks. In many ways his unit became America's first professional wildfire fighters.

Today the Forest Service and the Department of Interior are responsible for funding and executing our fire prevention effort. The wildfire season, particularly in the West is becoming longer, the fires more intense. In 2013, for example, as I'm sure Senator Feinstein will point out, the Rim Fire in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains, the third largest in the State's history, burned 257,000 acres. For people in Louisiana that is almost the same as the entire city of New Orleans.

Most tragically the 2013 Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona which many of our members know firsthand about, claimed the lives, sadly and tragically, of 19 city of Prescott firefighters, members of the elite Granite Mountain Hotshots.

In Louisiana and other parts of the country we understand the devastating impacts of natural disasters, particularly in Louisiana, better than most, unfortunately. We also understand that these catastrophic events are happening more frequently. They're becoming more intense. That our costs to clean up and recover goes up every year.

Our wildfire suppression and prevention strategy must adapt to this new reality.

We also must understand the smart prevention and a well resourced and timely response can make all the difference. The exponential growth in the cost of fighting larger and more intense fires has put a real strain on the budget of the Forest Service, in particular. In 1991 the Forest Service spent 13 percent of its overall budget on wildfire management.

But today that number is over 40 percent.

In 1985 the average annual fire suppression cost the Forest Service and the Department of Interior roughly \$630 million in 2013 dollars. But last year that number more than doubled to 1.7 billion.

The Forest Service has also exceeded the amount of money appropriated for fire suppression in 8 of the last 10 years requiring it to transfer funds from other projects often referred to fire borrowing to cover emergency costs. Just last week we learned from the Administration that the Forest Service will need an additional \$615 million to help fight fires this year with an early 50 percent of its initial fire suppression budget.

Fire borrowing places a tremendous burden on a number of important service, Forest Service, priorities. The practice does not stop at the middle divide. Eastern and Southern States feel the impact of the shuffling of funding. In my State, for example, in Louisiana, over \$130,000 in projects for wildlife management on almost 2,000 acres of the exquisite Kisatchie National Forest were canceled in 2013 because those resources were diverted to fight fire.

In 2013 a 1,200-acre timber sale on the Kisatchie National Forest to improve wildlife habitat by thinning overstocked pine trees was delayed because resources were diverted to fight fires, costing jobs in our State. This happens in many other States when fire borrowing occurs. So we need a solution. We need a long term, cost effective solution to adequately fund fire suppression to avoid having to make painful cuts in essential programs elsewhere.

Senators Wyden and Crapo, along with 13 of our colleagues including Senator Risch, Udall, Heinrich, Feinstein and Baldwin have introduced the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act that would cat-

egorize mega fires as natural disasters and fund their suppression under the disaster cap. It takes a whole Nation, in my opinion, including many agencies with proper resources and skills to effectively respond to and recover from natural disasters. This bill would categorize mega fires the same way we do hurricanes, catastrophic hurricanes and floods.

A natural disaster is not the time to play politics with recovery money. People want us to send aid, not delay, while we look for off-sets.

Currently 1 percent of fires account for nearly 30 percent of the total suppression budget. Funding these efforts under the disaster cap would lessen the budgetary pressure on the Forest Service and free its budget to address a full range of important priorities. Because this legislation would calculate the cost related to fire suppression in the 10-year rolling average that sets the disaster cap adjustment each year, it ensures that fire suppression costs do not impede funds available for FEMA and the Disaster Relief Fund.

This legislation enjoys the support of a broad coalition of senators on both sides of the aisle, the Administration and over 200 organizations such as the NRA, the Louisiana Forestry Association and the Sierra Club. This is a great example of bicameral, bipartisan legislation. I applaud Senators Wyden and Crapo for their efforts in this regard.

Let me just give just a brief closing here. Turn to my Ranking Member and then we will recognize the distinguished senators that are with us.

We should also look at how fire prevention programs can reduce the impact of dangerous wildfires across the country. As I've mentioned Kisatchie, I want to mention it just one more time. I was with the head of the Forest Service in Kisatchie that crosses 7 parishes in Louisiana.

On that tour which was extremely enlightening I learned that the Forest Service when it purposefully burns lands it can significantly reduce the wildfires that rage out of control and keep good timber for cutting and keep people protected. I'm looking forward to hearing more about that today. I was particularly happy to have that personal tour just a few weeks ago.

So let me turn to my Ranking Member, thank her for her cooperation and her advice on all these subjects. Then we will hear from the Senators.

Senator Murkowski, thank you for joining us this morning.

**STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR  
FROM ALASKA**

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Madame Chairman. I appreciate what we have in front of us today. Two very important interconnected topics that of wildfire preparedness as well as the budget request for the Forest Service for FY 2015.

As you have noted, wild land fire is a significant part of what the Forest Service and the Department of Interior focuses on these days and the budget of the Forest Service, in particular, reflects that. You've mentioned the fact that about 43 percent of the total budget of the Forest Service is consumed by fire fighting, up from

13 percent just 10 years ago. It would certainly appear that the situation is getting worse, not better.

Fire suppression costs continue to rise due, in large part, to just 3 factors.

The first is the unhealthy state of our forests. The Forest Service alone has nearly 65 to 85 million acres in the 155 million acre National Forest system that is in need of restoration and management. The expansion of development in the wild land urban interface and then finally the changes in climate, that are bringing longer and more severe fire seasons.

These escalating wildfire suppression costs are causing a financial crisis within the Forest Service. As you note, the Forest Service routinely exceeds its suppression budget causing it to transfer hundreds of millions from other important programs until some indeterminate date in the future. Ironically some of these transfers come from programs such as hazardous fuels that could actually reduce the costs of suppression in the long term.

Madame Chairman, I think this is a bad way to budget. It really has very real, very negative consequences for the management of the non-fire programs. To manage efficiently and effectively these program accounts need to be free of the kind of disruption that fire borrowing causes.

That is why I think everyone shares this primary goal of the fire cap adjustment proposal whether it's the one that is proposed by the Administration, the one that has been presented by Senators Wyden and Crapo or the one that Senator McCain is now adding into this mix. I think we would all agree that what we have to do here is we've got to stop the fire borrowing.

So the bigger question then is how do we do this in the most fiscally responsible manner?

We need a dialog. I think this is what we are starting. This is what, that is so necessary today.

I do believe that we can reach a resolution of the issue that not only fixes the problem but is also politically tenable in the current fiscally constrained environment. We know that budgeting is about priorities. It requires us to be strategic and efficient with our limited resources.

There are tradeoffs. We all recognize that. But I'm not sure that the choices that have been made in this budget are going to help the communities that are dependent upon our National Forest for economic survival. So we have to have a budget that provides the funding and the direction to actively manage for multiple use and that includes one that provides for a strong timber program, responsible natural resource development and quality recreation and wildlife programs.

I will have an opportunity to speak with the Chief when he comes up in the second panel. I'm not particularly excited about some of the priorities that I'm seeing in his budget for Alaska. But we'll have an opportunity to discuss that. But I certainly appreciate the leadership of our colleagues here before the committee as we address this very, very difficult issue of fire borrowing.

Thank you, Madame Chair.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator.



I'd like now to turn to Senator Feinstein for her opening statement and then later to introduce Chief Pimlott from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, CAL FIRE.

Next Senator Flake has asked to introduce Senator Mc Cain.

Then we will turn to Senator Crapo for his remarks.

Again, thank you, Senators, for taking the time to join us this morning and give us your thoughts and ideas about how to move forward.

Senator Feinstein.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DIANNE FEINSTEIN, U.S. SENATOR  
FROM CALIFORNIA**

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thank you very much, Madame Chairman.

I really want to thank both you and the Ranking Member for your help with our drought bill. It would not have happened without you both. I know the end particularly that Senator Murkowski went to to reconcile anomalies or any problem in the bill. I'm very grateful for that. I think this is in the best interest of working together in the Senate.

It's very difficult to overstate the risk of wildfire for my State. Since January of this year California has battled 3,198 wildfires that burned 27,770 acres. There have been nearly 900 more fires in California this year as compared to an average wildfire year.

Madame Chairman, you mentioned the Rim Fire. I will never forget when I was home for my birthday in June 2008 and on a single day in Northern California we had 20,000 lightning strikes that within 4 hours started 2,000 fires. It was a staggering event to see fire after fire erupt from these lightning strikes.

The Forest Service reports that much of California faces heightened risk of wildfire for the remainder of this summer. With 33 million acres of forest land including 19 million acres managed by the Federal Government, California always faces a significant threat of wildfire. However the ongoing drought has greatly intensified the risk.

Currently every county in California has been declared a drought disaster by Secretary Vilsack. The State's major reservoir levels are now at half or below of their historic levels. No significant rainfall is expected. 69 percent of our State, that's just about 70 percent of the State, is experiencing extreme drought conditions.

Essentially California is primed for a major wildfire disaster. The 3 largest fires in California history have occurred in the last decade. The report also found that the annual acreage burned by wildfires after 2000 is almost twice as much as the period between 1950 and 2000, in other words, the last half of the century before the new decade.

So what should we do?

I think we've got to change our budgeting process for wildfire disasters as soon as we can. In 8 of the past 10 years Congress has had to provide between 2 ½, excuse me, between 200 million and a billion in supplemental funds for wildfire disaster relief. This year the Departments of Agriculture and Interior said in May that their programs expect to spend 470 million more on fire suppression this year than they currently have on hand.

So we never budget enough. I know when I was Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee, we constantly had to add supplemental moneys. So clearly, the way we budget needs reworking.

I have joined Senator Wyden and Crapo as a co-sponsor of the legislation you mentioned, Madame Chairman. This bill would pay for the most destructive wildfires out of the Disaster Relief Fund which is the same way we currently pay for other natural disasters like hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, but not severe fire. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I hope we can prioritize funding for programs that help prevent wildfires including hazardous fuels removal and forest health.

But we've got to be more proactive. We've got to fix the budgeting problem. It's only a matter of time until another destructive fire ravages the West. So I hope that Congress can act quickly on the Wyden/Crapo bill. I would also note that I strongly support the President's supplementary request for 615 million in wildfire suppression.

Now I am also very pleased to introduce the gentleman sitting next to me. His name is Chief Ken Pimlott. He is the Director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection known as CAL FIRE. He oversees a total of 7,000 California fire fighters. So it is a very major department.

He has served as the Director of CAL FIRE since July 2011. He served California as a fire fighter for 30 years beginning as a reserve fire fighter with the Contra Costa Fire Protection District. He joined CAL FIRE in 1987 as a seasonal fire fighter in the Tulare unit.

Since then he's held a variety of management and fire protection roles in CAL FIRE including the Assistant Deputy Director, Pre Fire Management Division Chief and Program Manager for Cooperative Fire Protection Programs.

Chairman Landrieu and Ranking Member Murkowski and members, I'd really like to thank you for this. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to introduce a distinguished Californian. I look forward to the results of this hearing.

So, thank you very much.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

Chief, we'll receive your testimony after the Senators have completed theirs.

Senator Flake, you wanted to introduce Senator McCain?

#### **STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF FLAKE, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA**

Senator FLAKE. Yes, very, very briefly.

Senator McCain has often said that the battles in Arizona and in the West in the next century will be over fire and water. Last week we joined together to work on a water settlement to benefit the Hualapai Tribe. This week it's fire.

Senator McCain has, as you mentioned, Madame Chair, has introduced, along with myself and Senator Barrasso, the FLAME Act amendments, S. 2593. I'm pleased to join him on that. I'll let him talk about the specifics. But I believe it directly addresses this fire borrowing problem that we have.

Also like to welcome Dave Tenney here. Dave and I graduated from Snowflake High School. Dave, I understand, has postponed a trip to see his first grandson to be able to be here to testify. So, appreciate that, Dave.

Dave has since moved on and is coaching high school at a rival school, exhibiting questionable judgment there. But on fire and on these issues he's very good.

He saw the effects of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire, also the Wallow Fire and has been very instrumental in helping the White Mountain Stewardship contract work in his role with Navajo County. We've seen a big fire just in the last couple of weeks. It was a lot less than it would have otherwise been were it not for the work that is done under the White Mountain Stewardship contract.

So, pleased to have Dave here.

Thank you, Madame Chair, for letting me do this.

The CHAIR. Senator McCain.

#### **STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN MCCAIN, U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA**

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Madame Chairman, for the opportunity to say a few words at today's hearing. I know you'll agree with me when I say that wildfires are the predominant issue, fire and water, for Western States in the 21st century. I'm grateful the committee is holding this hearing on wildfire funding needs of the Forest Service. I'm appreciative.

I had no idea that you went to high school with Senator Flake. I'm glad you've done so well.

[Laughter.]

Senator MCCAIN. You're going to receive testimony from the Navajo County Supervisor, David Tenney, who is from Show Low. He's fought to bring some remarkable forest treatment projects to Arizona like the Four Forest Restoration Initiative and the White Mountain Stewardship Contract which was industry led forest treatment projects on large landscape levels.

Everybody knows wildfires have increased dramatically in size, severity and cost over the past few decades. In recent years we've seen wildfires consume up to 9 million acres during an extreme wildfire season. Cost over \$2 billion to suppress. Roughly 40 percent of the Forest Service budget.

Compare that to the fires of the 1980s and 1990s which averaged around 3 million acres per year and cost around \$700 million to fight or roughly 15 percent of the budget.

Madame Chairwoman, I watch my home State of Arizona burn every summer. I'm frustrated beyond words with the slow pace of forest thinning projects across the West. It's not just property as the Chairwoman and every member is aware, we lost 19 brave fire fighters a year ago in a terrible tragedy in Prescott and Yarnell, Arizona.

In my home State of Arizona, over 20 percent of our prime forests have been destroyed as we are struggling to thin 2.4 million acres for forest land in Arizona. So far of the 2.4 million acres we want thinned, we've thinned about 40,000 acres. That's not going to get it.

Arizona statewide landscape scales forest restoration program, nationally, the Forest Service estimates that about 62.5 to 82 million acres of National Forest lands are in need of forest thinning. So far 23 million acres have been completed.

I understand that the Administration and some in Congress propose for the wildfire funding issue by categorizing wildfire appropriation under FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, placing billions of dollars of suppression costs, "off budget." I agree that catastrophic wildfires are disastrous, perhaps less natural disaster and more manmade disaster in many cases.

Yes, wildfires deserve some level of budget flexibility. But unlike hurricanes and earthquakes the Federal Government can take action to reduce wildfire severity through forest thinning. I have concerns about the Administration's proposal because it essentially throws billions of dollars at wildfires year after year and fails to address the rising suppression costs.

Senator Barrasso, Senator Flake and I have introduced the FLAME Act that would require the Forest Service to budget for 100 percent for suppression needs using the most accurate peer reviewed budget model available to the Administration. It allows for some limited access to budget cap exceptions for extreme wildfires. But it also requires appropriators to invest in hazardous fuels reduction projects.

We believe industry can play a vital role in thinning our forests faster and more cost effectively than the Federal Government. Our bill proposes to expedite environmental procedures for treatment projects. The proposal will require us to make tough choices about which Forest Service programs are spending priorities.

Until we responsibly restore our forest ecosystems to their natural state, I see no higher priority for the Forest Service than putting out wildfires and thinning out forests.

I thank the committee for allowing me to speak. I know that the Chairwoman knows and I know other members, many of whom are from the West, know the devastation of forest fires and not as in the fires themselves, but the landslides afterwards, the ecological disaster, the environmental disaster, the wildlife, the list goes on and on of the terrible tragedies that ensue after these forest fires end.

If it keeps up the way it is, it is literally going to consume every one of our national forests, at least in the West. Obviously something has to change and change drastically. So I appreciate the committee and their commitment and yours, Madame Chairwoman, on this very vital issue.

I thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator McCain.

Let me assure you that I and the Ranking Member and the members of this committee take this issue very seriously. We are very sympathetic to the challenges in Arizona, particularly, with the drought, the fires and the immigration issue. Your team is working double time. We're going to do everything we can to assist you.

Senator Crapo, we're happy to have you today.

Then Senator, I think Udall, wants to introduce Mr. Gibbs.  
Senator.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE CRAPO, U.S. SENATOR  
FROM IDAHO**

Senator CRAPO. Thank you very much, Chairman Landrieu and Ranking Member Murkowski for holding this important hearing on how our Nation budgets for seasonal wildfires.

I appreciate you providing me with the opportunity to speak about a measure that I co-sponsored with Senators Ron Wyden and Jim Risch, along with a number of other bipartisan members of the Senate.

S. 1875, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act would fix a fundamental flaw in how our country funds wildfire suppression. By way of context it's important to note that the National Interagency Fire Center reported that last year there were more than 47,000 wild land fires nationwide that burned 4.3 million acres. More than 722,000 of those acres burned in my home State of Idaho alone.

I just reviewed the statistics for this year. The wildfire season is already well underway in Idaho. As I'm sure it is in a number of other places in the country.

As more resources go toward fire suppression resources that could be used to implement projects that improve forest health, benefit forest communities and enhance public safety are squeezed. In fact in 8 of the past 10 years Federal agencies' fire suppression efforts have been under budgeted which has led to resources being taken from important projects to cover the Federal Government's response to the wild land fires.

For example, in fiscal year 2013 Federal agencies borrowed more than \$600 million from other accounts to cover the costs of fire suppression. Such fire borrowing is disruptive to important forest management missions including activities such as thinning that would both reduce the occurrence and the severity of the fires and drive down suppression costs.

In one of the many disruptions in Idaho fire borrowing has meant that the Forest Service was unable to meet noxious weed commitments and reduce hazardous fuels while wildlife habitat treatment projects went unfinished.

In Louisiana, Chairman Landrieu, I understand you've already made this point, a 1,200-acre timber sale on the Kisatchie National Forest that was intended for critical habitat for the Red Cockaded Woodpecker was disrupted.

Ranking Member Murkowski, timber projects and sale activities have been disrupted in Alaska, as you know, in each of the past 2 years, at least because of the fire borrowing.

These events have serious economic consequences for the men and women who work in the logging industry and the many mills that depend on the timber they produce. What's worse is that Congress must restore this funding through off budget emergency spending which is ineffective and bad budget policy.

The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act would give more—give firefighters and land managers more tools for efficient and effective fire management and strengthen our fire prevention efforts.

Our bill would better limit the reallocation of resources away from fire prevention and hazardous fuels reduction projects which reduce the cycle of costly fires.

It would also help cover the under budgeted and growing cost of fire suppression. Importantly our bill would improve the way wild-fire suppression is funded without increasing Federal funding.

As the Congressional Budget Office analysis concluded, our bill would not score. It will not increase the deficit. The CBO explicitly states that S. 1875 would have no effect on the Federal budget.

This measure accomplishes this by enabling emergency fire events to be treated like other major natural disasters by supporting these emergency wildfires through existing disaster programs. Emergency fire events would be funded under disaster programs and the routine wild land firefighting costs would be funded through the regular budgeting process. By allocating funding for wildfire suppression from within existing disaster funding limits the legislation does not increase Federal funding.

Another fire season has already begun and conditions are concerning. The National Interagency Fire Center reports that fuels and drought conditions across the West point to a condition that would support a greater than usual likelihood of significant fire.

We must take steps now that will put us on improved footing to face current and future fires.

We must now act to ensure that those protecting our communities have the resources necessary to decrease the threat of fires and to respond to wild land fires.

Firefighters, land managers and forest communities deserve assurance that steps will be taken to continually improve the Federal response to wildfires. Our legislation would assist with that effort. Our bill enjoys wide support from both sides of the aisle and both chambers of Congress and from more than 230 timber, sportsmen and conservation groups.

Again, Madame Chairman and Ranking Member, I appreciate the opportunity you've given me to speak to you today on this important and critical issue and appreciate your attention to it.

Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much, Senator.

Senator Udall is going to take a moment now to introduce Mr. Gibbs, at his request.

Then we're going to start Chief, with you, for your testimony.

We have a second panel, so we're going to move through this hearing pretty quickly. We're going to try to adjourn at 12:15 because votes have been called at 12 o'clock.

Senator Udall.

#### **STATEMENT OF HON. MARK UDALL, U.S. SENATOR FROM COLORADO**

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Madame Chair.

I want to thank you and Senator Murkowski for responding to my request in holding this hearing. Wildfire, the state of our forests and what we can do to protect our communities and our water supplies is a critical issue in Colorado and across the West, as we've heard from all of our colleagues.

I'm here not only as a Coloradan but as someone whose home has been subject to a wildfire evacuation order. In Colorado the question is not if we will have another mega fire, it's when. Colo-

radans understand that there's no greater threat to our special way of life, our water supplies and communities than wildfire.

Indeed, places like my home town of El Dorado Springs and other cities and towns across our State are increasingly living under the threat of wildfire. But we're making progress. For example, I'm pleased that in the new Farm bill that the forestry title includes many provisions that support more on the ground work and streamlining the agency processes. Some of these, such as the Good Neighbor Authority and Stewardship Contracting are provisions that I've worked on for years and have been proud to work in a bipartisan manner with my Republican colleagues such as Senator McCain and Senator Barrasso.

This winter I had the opportunity to sit down with community leaders for a round table discussion about wildfire and forest health in Frisco, Colorado. Frisco is a thriving community in the heart of Colorado ski country. I hope you all have been there. If you haven't, you have to go to Frisco. But it's also in the middle of the bark beetle epidemic that's decimated over 4 million acres of forests in my State alone.

Now Dan Gibbs, the Summit County Commissioner, who is here to testify today, was at that meeting. We heard about a slew of great projects, as Dan knows, and great ideas that the community is leading to become safer and more sustainable. However, I heard over and over that the U.S. Forest Service can't serve as a reliable partner because of its outdated and profoundly broken wildfire budgeting system.

That's why I've been right in the middle of leading bipartisan efforts here in Congress to fundamentally change and modernize how the Federal Government funds wildfire fighting and prevention programs so that they're treated like other natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes. As we've heard, this approach has been endorsed by over 120 Members of the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats and 200 groups ranging from the timber industry to the environmental community. As the Denver Post Editorial page put it this past weekend, "Using disaster fund money for wildfires could solve a lot of problems long term and we hope Congress sees it that way."

Some of the problems that could be solved include freeing up the National Forest to reduce hazardous fuels, provide quality recreation experiences and provide the timber supply to sustain a diverse forest products industry while also providing safe, modern air tankers to keep our communities and fire fighters safe. This is the fiscally responsible thing to do. Study after study shows that for one dollar we spend on mitigation and prevention we save \$4.00 later.

I'm excited to have been able to invite Commissioner Gibbs to share his experiences with us. He's an expert on this issue in every sense of the word. He's a wild land firefighter, former State legislator, who led the State's early efforts to battle the bark beetle epidemic and he now serves the residents of Summit County, a place that's dependent on healthy forests and the outdoor recreation economy.

So again, I want to thank you, Commissioner, for traveling to Washington to share your perspective on these crucial issues with this committee.

Thank you, Madame Chair.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator Udall, for your leadership, for requesting this meeting, for your consistent leadership on this issue and for your introduction of Mr. Gibbs.

Chief, we'll begin with you.

If you all can limit to, I think, 5 minutes?

**STATEMENT OF KEN PIMLOTT, DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION (CAL FIRE), SACRAMENTO, CA**

Mr. PIMLOTT. Absolutely.

Good morning, Madame Chair and members of the committee, Ken Pimlott, Director of CAL FIRE.

I think all of the testimony so far has really hit the nail on the head and hit the mark for the conditions that we're facing in the West with drought and 3 years of unprecedented, below normal precipitation. California and many of the other Western States are facing unprecedented fire conditions. Literally as we speak today several large fires are burning in California, Oregon and Washington.

Again 3 years of critically low precipitation has left vegetation parched and ripe to burn. Senator Feinstein talked about 2008 where we had 2,000 fires started from a lightning event in just a 4 hour period. We are literally just 4 hours away from a similar event that the fuel conditions are very, very similar, if not worse than they were then.

So far as a result Southern California has been in a continuous fire season since April of last year.

Almost 2,000 acres burned on the Angeles National Forest on January 16th, winter.

San Diego experienced devastating Santa Ana wind driven fires in May, a phenomenon that normally occurs in the fall months.

Northern California experienced large fire activity beginning in January with fires on the Lhasa National Forest and in Humboldt County, normally one of the wettest places in the country in January.

The number of fires so far this year, as Senator Feinstein pointed out, is well above average. They are burning with a speed and intensity that we would normally see at the peak of the summer and fall months, literally spotting well ahead of the fire but consuming the fuel right down to the soil.

We didn't get to these conditions overnight. During the last 4 decades the average length of fire season has increased by over 70 days throughout the West. As we experience the impacts of climate change and periodic drought the frequency and size of wildfires will only increase into the future.

Therefore it is critical that we continue to invest in forest management, fire prevention, fuels treatment and a strong wildfire response. The Western Governors Association, the National Association of State Foresters, organizations that California actively participates in, support S. 1875 as a solution to this challenge. A Fed-



eral budgeting mechanism that fully funds wild land fire response is critical to successfully addressing this growing wildfire challenge.

An emergency or reserve fund, similar to what California utilizes to address its extraordinary wild land, firefighting costs, is important so that emergency firefighting costs on Federal responsibility areas do not impact the Federal funds budgeted for forest health, vegetation management and fire prevention program activities. It takes all of these efforts combined to combat the extraordinary conditions that we're seeing the West.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share comments today.  
[The prepared statement of Mr. Pimlott follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEN PIMLOTT, DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF  
FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION (CAL FIRE), SACRAMENTO, CA

Senator Feinstein hit the mark with her comments. California, as well as other western states, is facing unprecedented fire conditions. As we speak today, several large fires are burning in the State.

Three years of critically low precipitation have left vegetation parched and ripe to burn.

As a result, Southern California has been in continuous fire season since April of last year (2013). Almost 2000 acres burned on the Angeles National Forest on January 16th. San Diego experienced devastating Santa Ana wind driven fires in May, a phenomenon normally reserved for the fall months.

Northern California experienced large fire activity beginning in January, with fires on the Lassen National Forest and in Humboldt County, normally one of the wettest places in the country.

The number of fires so far this year is well above the average and they are burning with a speed and intensity that would normally occur in the peak of summer or fall.

We did not get to these critical conditions over night. During the last four decades, the average length of fire season in the west has become over 70 days longer.

As we experience the impacts of climate change and periodic drought, the frequency and size of wild fires will only increase in the future.

Therefore, it is critical that we continue to invest in forest management, fire prevention, fuels treatment and a strong wildfire response.

The Western Governors Association and the National Association of State Foresters, organizations that California actively participates in, both support S.1875 as a solution.

A federal budgeting mechanism that fully funds wildland fire response is critical to successfully addressing this growing wildland fire challenge.

An emergency or reserve fund, similar to what California utilizes to address the extraordinary costs of wildland firefighting, is important so that emergency firefighting costs in federal responsibility areas do not impact the federal funds budgeted for forest health, vegetation management and fire prevention program activities.

It takes all of these, combined, to combat the extraordinary conditions we are seeing in the west.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much, Chief.  
Mr. Tenney.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID PORTER TENNEY, NAVAJO COUNTY  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, NAVAJO, AZ**

Mr. TENNEY. Thank you.

Madame Chairwoman and committee members, thank you for the invitation to address you today. For the record, my name is David Porter Tenney. I am a member of the Board of Supervisors in Navajo County which is located in Northeastern Arizona.

I appreciate Senator Flake and Senator McCain having me here today. As far as football season is concerned we'll have a gentle-

man's wager a little later on on which team will actually get it done this year.

I will begin by stating that the Forest Service budget has a direct impact on the safety and economic prosperity of my county. I'm no stranger to wildfires or the need to better manage our forests. The 468,000-acre Rodeo Chediski Fire of 2002 burned in my county and nearly destroyed my home. The 538,000-acre Wallow Fire of 2011 burned in two of my neighboring counties.

The footprints left by these two fires could comfortably hold the Cities of Phoenix, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles. The cost to fight and recover from the fires was over \$230 million, not to mention the value of 4 million board feet of timber that was destroyed and the nearly 500 homes that were lost.

As a participant of Arizona's 4 forest restoration initiative I have strongly argued that forest industry is the key ingredient for managing our forests. Fire suppression alone cannot and should not be the primary focus. We spend way too much time and money on putting out burning trees instead of cutting them and putting them to good use.

Cutting trees saves our forests. It saves our watersheds. It saves our communities. It improves our economy. It creates jobs and it saves money.

Thinning the forest is just smart. It is responsible. It produces measureable results.

I have reviewed the amendment introduced by Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso, the FLAME Act amendments. I believe they have identified a solution. While I appreciate the Administration's proposal to spend more money on suppression I would prefer a more fiscally sound way to address rising wildfire costs. In addition the Administration's proposal does not guarantee forest thinning projects, but they will move forward aggressively like the McCain, Barrasso and Flake proposal.

Our combined mistakes in forest management have changed rural counties like mine. I am tired of watching my State burn. We must make a significant departure from the present way of dealing with landscape wildfire.

Let me give you one recent example that illustrates why forest thinning is a cost effective way to prevent fires. The San Juan Fire started June 26 of this year on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and entered the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest soon after. The causes of this fire is under investigation but the fire is now been contained at about 7,000 acres.

The San Juan Fire cost \$6.5 million dollars to fight. That is a cost of \$932 dollars an acre to burn trees. If we were to spend that same \$6.5 million on NEPA and forest treatment, the Apache Sitgreaves would get 50,000 acres cut and put money into the Treasury. Fifty thousand acres of treated forest is better than 7,000 acres of nothing, especially when our region of Arizona has multiple sawmills predicting a short fall of timber supply this fall.

Let me reiterate that. We could spend on average \$128 an acre in preparing, studying and selling these acres for treatment or 932 an acre to put out a fire. Even my Snowflake High School math tells me that's pretty easy decision to make.

Areas where thinning and prescribed fire treatments have been implemented under the White Mountain Stewardship Contract modified the San Juan Fire's behavior so that suppression resources were able to successfully engage the fire. Fire behavior in the treated areas were significantly reduced with maximum rates of spread of one to two miles per hour, flame lengths of 8 to twelve feet and spotting distances of 150 to 200 feet.

In untreated areas the spread was twice as fast. The flame lengths were ten times as long and spotting was as much as a half mile.

Certain portions of the fire spread were entirely stopped by forest thinning and allowed firefighters to quickly and safely contain the fire by utilizing hand lines, dozer lines and burning out along the road system in these treated areas. However, it was not enough to prevent two spotted owl packs from being destroyed.

Madame Chairwoman and committee members, to a large extent the rural communities of the Nation were founded on and exist from the use of the abundant natural resources that surrounded them. We know that thinning the forest works. It saves money. It makes money. Yet we currently have a system in place that misuses taxpayer dollars and gives no chance of improving the situation.

Right now there's a system in place which is called fire borrowing. The Forest Service and local supervisor and their staff typically get their budget sometime in April or May. That's about 8 months into the fiscal year. Then they have about 2 months to initiate contracts and other hazardous fuel treatments and work significant portions of the budget—before significant portions of their budget get pulled by the Washington office for fire suppression.

After the fire season, if there's anything left, these funds are taken or then redistributed. This isn't called fire borrowing. We call it fire plundering because we know that the local forest supervisor and their staff rarely get back what was borrowed.

Usually when you borrow something you give back more than you take. We call that interest. But right now I can't find any interest that is served if we don't apply the sound managerial and fiscal policy that is being proposed by this amendment.

I support Senators McCain and Flake and Barrasso and the legislation they propose because it bans fire borrowing and requires the Forest Service to fully fund suppression costs with a two to one ratio.

The CHAIR. Can you try to wrap up? It's excellent.

Mr. TENNEY. One more paragraph.

The CHAIR. Go right ahead.

Mr. TENNEY. Thank you.

I understand there are a lot of other worthy Forest Service programs that need funding, but fighting fires and thinning our forests should be the agency's highest priority. We have proof that treatment works and dramatically cut down the cost of suppression in the future. The solution to catastrophic fire is getting industry back into the forest to thin the trees in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. Their bill leads us down this path.

Madame Chairwoman, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tenney follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVID PORTER TENNEY, NAVAJO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, NAVAJO COUNTY, HOLBROOK, AZ, ON S. 2363

Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to address you today. For the record, my name is David Porter Tenney, and I am a member of the Board of Supervisors in Navajo County, which is located in northeastern Arizona.

I will begin by stating that the use of forest industry is the key ingredient for managing our forests. Fire suppression cannot, and should not be the primary focus. We spend way too much time and money on putting out burning trees instead of cutting them and putting them to good use. Cutting trees saves our forests, it saves our watersheds, it saves our communities, it improves our economy, it creates jobs and it saves money. Thinning the forest is smart. It is responsible and it produces measureable results. I have reviewed the Amendment to the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act of 2014 introduced by Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso and I believe they have identified both the problem and the solution.

The management of natural resources has become critically important to rural areas across the Country. The 468,000 acre Rodeo-Chediski Fire of 2002 burned in my county and nearly destroyed my home; and the 538,000 acre Wallow Fire of 2011 burned in two of my neighboring counties. The footprints left by these two fires could comfortably hold the cities of Phoenix, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles and the cost to fight and recover from the fires was over \$230,000,000. The fires destroyed more than 4 billion board feet of timber, and destroyed over 400 homes.

Our combined mistakes in forest management have changed rural counties like mine, and I am tired of watching my State burn. Starting with the legislation introduced by Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso—we must make a significant departure from the present way of dealing with landscape wildfire.

Let me give you one recent example that illustrates why. The San Juan Fire started on June 26, 2014, on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and entered the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest soon after detection. The cause is unknown and under investigation, but the fire has now been contained at approximately 7,000 acres. The San Juan Fire cost \$6,500,000 to fight. That is a cost of \$932.00 an acre to burn trees. If we were to spend that same \$6,500,000 on NEPA and forest treatment, the Apache-Sitgreaves could get 50,000 acres cut and put money into the Treasury. 50,000 acres of treated forest is better than 7,000 acres of nothing. Especially when our region of Arizona has multiple saw mills predicting a shortfall of timber supply this fall. Let me reiterate that. We could spend, on average, \$128.00 per acre in preparing, studying and selling acres for treatment in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest or spend hundreds more per acre in suppression and no production. That is not the right plan, but it illustrates the problem across the Country.

Areas where thinning and prescribed fire treatments had been implemented under the White Mountain Stewardship Contract modified the San Juan Fire's behavior so that suppression resources were able to successfully engage the fire. Fire behavior in the treated areas were significantly reduced with maximum rates of spread of 1-2 mph, maximum flame lengths of 8-12 feet, and spotting distances of 150-200 feet. In most instances, the treated areas burned at about 1-2 feet high and will produce a beautiful and clean forest. In untreated areas the spread was twice as fast, had flame lengths 10X as high and spotting of half a mile. Certain portions of the fire's spread were entirely stopped by the forest thinning, and allowed firefighters to quickly and safely contain the fire by utilizing hand-lines, dozer-lines, and burning out along the road system in these treated areas, however, it was not enough to prevent two spotted owl packs from being destroyed.

Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, to a large extent, the rural communities of the Nation were founded on, and exist from, the use of the abundant natural resources that surrounded them. We know that thinning in the forest works, it saves money—it makes money, and yet we currently have a system in place that misuses the taxpayer's dollars—and gives no chance of improving the situation.

Right now, there is a system in place which is called "fire borrowing". In the Forest Service, a local Forest Supervisor and their staff typically get their budget sometime in April or May of a given year. That is about eight months into the fiscal year. They then have about two months to initiate contracts and other hazardous fuel

treatment work before significant portions of their budget get pulled out by the Washington Office for fire suppression across the Country.

After the fire season, if there is anything left, the funds that were taken are then redistributed. I don't call this situation "fire borrowing" I call it "fire plundering," because we know that the local Forest Supervisor and their staff rarely get back what was "borrowed". Usually, when you borrow something you give back more than you take. We call that interest. But right now, I can't find any interest that is served if we don't apply the sound managerial and fiscal policy that is being proposed with this amendment.

I support Senators McCain, Flake and Barrasso and the legislation they have proposed. Requiring that the equivalent of at least half of the cost of suppression go to treatment will dramatically cut down on the cost of suppression in the future. We have proof that treatment works. The solution to catastrophic wildfire is getting industry back into the forest to thin the trees in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. This amendment leads us down that path.

Mr. Chairman, and Committee members, as a county supervisor who has seen and experienced the consequences of a forest that is not permitted to be properly managed, I implore you to move this amendment forward.

Thank you for this opportunity. I would be happy to stand for any questions.

The CHAIR. Mr. Tenney, thank you for that excellent testimony. I tend to agree with a great deal of what you said. I promise you, we will address it as quickly as we can.

Mr. TENNEY. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Mr. Gibbs.

#### **STATEMENT OF DAN GIBBS, COMMISSIONER, SUMMIT COUNTY, BRECKENRIDGE, CO**

Mr. GIBBS. Thank you, Chairman Landrieu, Ranking Member Murkowski, members of the committee. It's a great honor to come before you today. My name is Dan Gibbs. I'm a County Commissioner from Summit County, Colorado, but also a wild land firefighter.

This committee will have the benefit of hearing from Federal land managers to paint the larger picture of the wildfire budgeting system. I'd like to share with you how this current system impacts local Colorado communities.

Summit County is semi-rural community located in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, serving as a year round, international destination for outdoor recreation. It's home to the world known ski areas of Breckenridge, Keystone, Copper Mountain and Arapaho Basin. The county's permanent population totals about 30,000 people, but it swells to about 160,000 during peak seasons.

80 percent of Summit County's land mass is Federal lands including 312,000 acres of the White River National Forest. The White River National Forest spans 2.3 million acres across North Western Colorado and receives more than 12 million visitors per year. This is more visitors than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon National Parks combined. It's the busiest national forest in the system.

The natural environment housed in the White River National Forest is the foundation of our local economy and our community's cultural identity. It also serves as the largest drinking water supply for the Denver metro area. As such local government agencies and private businesses in Summit County have strong working relationships with local forest managers in our mutual efforts to provide world class recreation, clean water and healthy forests.

From this perspective the current model for funding the response to wild land fires is extremely judgmental to Colorado's economy and quality of life. In recent years the White River National Forest has been subject to successive rounds of budget cuts that hamper the agency's ability to carry out essential day to day operations, further exacerbating the situation as what's known as fire borrowing in which local forest budgets are raided to fund the national response to wildfires across the country.

Last year our local forest unit had over 480,000 transferred from its normal operating budgets to support wildfire response efforts. As a result we saw reductions in trail maintenance, recreation facility maintenance, forest health work, invasive species control, fish and wildlife restoration. These reductions have clear negative impacts to recreation and local economies in the immediate term. Their effects will be felt years and decades into the future as we fail to seize windows of opportunity to protect critical habitats, safeguard our water supplies and prevent the wildfires of tomorrow.

As wild land fires grow larger and more destructive we cannot continue to fight them by picking the pockets of our public land agencies. This short sighted approach diverts critical funding sources to the symptoms of this problem, hobbling our thoughtful plans for mitigation and prevention on the front end through fuels reduction.

Adding urgency to the subject, some counties at the epicenter of Colorado's massive Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic which has left millions of acres of dead trees in its wake. For the last 8 years we've worked cooperatively with U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Foresters, local fire districts, private landowners, to deal with the impacts of this epidemic and to create a forest condition that will be more resilient to catastrophic wild fires and future insect disease outbreaks. This effort is so important to our community that in 2008 Summit County voters overwhelmingly passed a referendum to fund \$500,000 annually to support the creation of defensible space, resilient forests and support for other wild land mitigation efforts.

However, when the Federal funding for fuel reduction work is diverted to fight fires elsewhere it perpetuates the threat we face in our own backyards. Just last year, for example, a \$72,000 project to clear dead fall in a popular recreation area was deferred. This had substantial impact on our 50 to 100 miles of trails with associated effects on recreation opportunities, outfitter guide operations and recreation based economies.

We cannot afford to delay or defer these types of projects which are critical to preventing dangerous forest fires. This is why the Wild Land Fire Suppression cap adjustment is so important to the residents and visitors of Summit County and to Colorado as a whole.

I appreciate the assistance that Congress has provided for land management and restoration activities primarily through the passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act in 2003. However, there's much more than can be done. Passage of S. 1875 would be an important step in ending the damaging practice of raiding agency balances to fund fire suppression at the expense of such impor-

tant preventative activities as land management and restoration, fire preparedness and capital improvement. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gibbs follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAN GIBBS, SUMMIT COUNTY COMMISSIONER,  
BRECKENRIDGE, CO, ON S. 1875

Thank you Chairman Landrieu, members of the committee. It is a great honor to come before you today. My name is Dan Gibbs; I'm a County Commissioner from Summit County Colorado and also a certified wildland firefighter.

This Committee has had the benefit of hearing from the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to paint the larger picture regarding the wildfire budgeting system, and I'd like to share with you is how this current system impacts local Colorado communities.

The Summit County jurisdiction that I serve is a semi-rural resort community located in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. The permanent population of the county is approximately 30,000 people, but swells to over 160,000 during peak holiday seasons.

Summit County is home to extensive outdoor year-round recreation. It is comprised of over 80% federal lands and is home to the internationally recognized ski resorts of Breckenridge, Keystone, Copper Mountain, and Arapahoe Basin. All of these resorts are located in the White River National Forest, which receives more than 12 million visitors annually according to the most recent survey data. This is more visits per year than Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Parks combined, and is the busiest Forest in the system.

The White River National Forest and our natural environment are the foundation of our local economy and enhance the quality of life that our citizens and visitors from all over the world enjoy in Summit County. We have a strong working relationship with local forest managers in working to provide the world-class recreation, clean water, and healthy forests our residents, visitors, and businesses rely on.

However, the current model for funding the response to wildland fires is extremely detrimental to our economy and quality of life. We have recently observed that Forest budgets supporting the work to maintain these characters have been significantly depleted, and are continuing to trend downward. Further exacerbating this situation is what is known as "fire borrowing," in which local Forest budgets are raided to fund the national response to wildfires across the country.

Last year our local Forest unit had over \$480,000 transferred from a range of resource programs to meet the wildfire response effort. As a result, we saw reductions in trail maintenance, recreation facility maintenance, forest health work, invasive species control, and fish and wildlife habitat restoration, all of which had detrimental impacts to our economy.

As these fires get larger and more destructive we cannot continue to have these costs come from federal land agencies as we will lose all the funding we could use to reduce the cost of these disasters at the front end through fuels reduction.

I also want to highlight that Summit County is at the epicenter of the massive mountain pine beetle epidemic in Colorado and the west that has left hundreds of thousands of acres of dead trees in its wake. For the last eight years we have worked cooperatively with the US Forest Service, Colorado State foresters, local fire districts and private landowners to deal with the impact of this epidemic, and secure a forest condition that will be more resilient to catastrophic wildfires and future insect or disease outbreaks. This effort is so important to our community that in 2008, our voters overwhelmingly passed a referendum to fund \$500,000 annually to support creation of defensible space, resilient forests and support for other wildland fire mitigation efforts.

However, when funding to accomplish the fuel reduction and regeneration work we need is diverted to fight fires elsewhere, it perpetuates the threat we face in our own backyards.

Just last year, for example, a \$72,000 project to clear deadfall and conduct related trail maintenance in areas affected by the bark beetle epidemic was deferred. This had a significant impact on 50-100 miles of trails, with associated effects on recreation opportunities, outfitter-guide operations, and recreation-based community economies. We cannot afford to delay or defer this type of project that is critical to preventing potentially dangerous forest fires and this is why the Wildland Fire Suppression Cap Adjustment is so important to the residents and visitors to our state and county.

I appreciate the assistance that Congress has provided for land management and restoration activities—primarily through the passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) in 2003. This law, which came as a response to major forest fires that occurred throughout the west in 2002.

However, there is much more that can be done, and passage of S. 1875 the Wildland Fire Suppression Cap Adjustment would be an important step in ending the damaging practice of raiding agency balances to fund fire suppression at the expense of such important activities as land management and restoration, fire preparedness, and capital improvement. I urge you to support this bill.

Thank you.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much, Mr. Gibbs.

All of your testimony was just excellent. We're looking forward to reviewing it.

Because of time, if any members have questions we could take them now, but I'd like to introduce the second panel and be open to questions then. Is that OK with everyone?

Thank you all very much. Really appreciate it.

If the second panel would come forward. While they're coming forward let me begin the introductions.

Chief Tidwell from the Forest Service.

Chief Tidwell is a veteran of the Forest Service, an expert in wildfire management. As I mentioned earlier I had the opportunity to tour the Kisatche National Forest which is inside of Louisiana in the central part of our State, with him recently. We spent several hours together and look forward to hearing his testimony this morning.

I think you all will be encouraged by what he has to say.

I also would like to introduce Kim Thorsen from the Department of the Interior.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Public Safety, Resource Protection, Emergency Services, Ms. Thorsen has been out on the front lines of Interior's role in wildfire management and interdepartmental coordination.

Chief, thank you for being here. We look forward to hearing from both of you. Chief, we're open for your testimony at this time.

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS TIDWELL, CHIEF, FOREST SERVICE,  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Mr. TIDWELL. Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Murkowski and then members of the committee, thank you for having this hearing. It is impressive to be able to see the other senators that were here today. What I really appreciate is the general agreement. We have a problem. I appreciate everyone's work to find a solution.

You know, once again, we're having another challenging fire season. It's been described by members here plus the previous panel. There's just no question that, once again, we're up against another very challenging season.

We see it with the fires that are going on in California and also in Oregon and then just another start in Washington. So there's no question we're going to have another, very active, probably another 3 months, of very active fire season that I can share with you that we are ready.

With our cooperating partners there's no country in the world that has a better model, a better approach for dealing with wild-



fire. Because of that we continue to be able to have our success at 98 percent of being successful to be able to catch fires during initial attack. With that being said, that 2 percent of fires that get away every year, are the ones that cause the problems.

Now last year when I was testifying before this committee I was asking for your support for some key authorities, Stewardship Contracting, the Good Neighbor Authority. They were about to expire. So I wanted to first of all thank this committee for their support through the Farm Bill to make sure that we continue to have those authorities in addition to the insect and disease designation.

These authorities, along with our FY 2015 budget request will allow us to be able to increase the work that we're doing to restore our national forests and grasslands. To ensure they continue to provide all the benefits, all the multiple uses that our public wants and needs from these lands.

This budget request also increases the investment in reducing fire risk to communities, to our firefighters, by asking for additional funding in hazardous fuels and additional funding to be able to restore more acres of our national forest.

Through the proposed budget cap adjustment we will be able to finally stop this disruptive practice of having to shut down operations in August and September just to transfer funds to be able to pay for fire suppression. Then a few months later to have Congress repay those funds.

I want to thank Senators Wyden and Crapo for introducing the Wildfire Disaster Fund Act and for the members who have co-sponsored that.

I also want to acknowledge Senator McCain's work along with Senator Barrasso and Flake for their interest to be able to find a solution to this problem that, what I'm hearing today, there seems to be general agreement that we need to find a solution.

As it's been stated numerous times, going back to 1991 where we spent about 13 percent of our budget on fire, today we're spending over 40 percent of it. In addition to that the 10-year average cost of fire suppression, in just the last 12 years, has gone up \$500 million. Under a constrained budget that's \$500 million that has to be taken from all the other programs that the public relies on for the Forest Service to provide. We have to take \$500 million every year from those programs just to continue to pay for fire suppression.

The consequences of this is that over this period of time our staffing has been reduced by 35 percent. Just our staffing for forest management, the folks that do the work to be able to reduce the hazardous fuels, the folks that do the work to restore our forests, that staffing has gone down 49 percent.

Now our staff has done a great job to be able to continue to treat as many acres as we have over the last 10 years. In fact based on what we're projecting in FY 2015, we'll be doing about the same amount of work with about half the number of people we were doing 12 years ago. But I'll tell you that's about as far as we can go.

It is time for us to be able to find a new solution and to be able to, not only stop fire transfer, but at the same time, have an opportunity to reinvest, to be able to deal with more of the hazardous fuels issues and to get on top of restoring our national forests.

Now I can't change the fact there our fire seasons today are 60 to 80 days longer. They're burning hotter with drier conditions. We have more homes than ever in the wild land urban interface.

But I know that we have an opportunity that if we want to reinvest. We can make a difference to reduce the threat to our communities, to reduce the threat to our firefighters. But it's going to take additional investments for us to be able to treat more acres than we have been able to do in the past.

Madame Chairwoman, thank you again for having this hearing. I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tidwell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS TIDWELL, CHIEF, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
FOREST SERVICE

Chairwoman Landrieu, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the status of wildland fire program efforts as it pertains to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 President's Budget Proposal for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. The April 2, 2014 testimony regarding the entire Forest Service FY 2015 Budget Request is appended to my statement today.

The FY 2015 President's Budget for the Forest Service focuses on three key areas: restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fires. It calls for a fundamental change in how wildfire suppression is funded. It proposes a new and fiscally responsible funding strategy for wildland fire, contributes to long-term economic growth, and continues our efforts to achieve the greatest benefits for the taxpayer at the least cost. This budget will enable us to more effectively reduce fire risk, manage landscapes more holistically, and increase resiliency of the Nation's forests and rangelands as well as the communities that border them.

Increases in large fires in the West have coincided with an increase in temperatures and early snow melt in recent years. These factors also contribute to longer fire seasons. The length of the fire season has increased by over two months since the 1970s (Westerling, 2006). Contributing to the problem of large fires is severe drought, increased levels of hazardous fuels and a changing climate. Some experts anticipate future fire seasons on the order of 12 to 15 million acres burned each year. Extreme wildfire threatens lives and the natural resources people need and value, such as clean, abundant water; clean air; fish and wildlife habitat; open space for recreation; and other forest products and services.

The Forest Service Missoula Fire Lab completed an analysis in 2012 that showed 58 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands with a high, or very high, potential for a large wildfire that would be difficult for suppression resources to contain (Dillon, 2012). At the same time, landscapes are becoming more susceptible to fire impacts, and more Americans are choosing to build their home in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). In the conterminous United States, some 32 percent of housing units (i.e. homes, apartment buildings, and other human dwellings) and one-tenth of all land with housing units are situated within the WUI (Radeloff et al., 2005). The Forest Service estimates that 464 million acres of all vegetated lands are at moderate to very high risk from uncharacteristically large wildfires (Dillon 2012). The National Association of State Foresters estimates that over 70,000 communities are at risk from wildfire.

REDUCING HAZARDOUS FUELS

Excess fuels often include leaf litter and debris on the forest floor as well as the branches and foliage of small trees. These provide ladder fuels that often allow surface fires to transition to high intensity crown fires. Fuel treatments result in more resilient and healthier ecosystems that provide the many benefits society wants and needs, including clean water, scenic and recreational values, wood products, biodiversity, communities that are better able to withstand wildfire, and safer conditions for firefighters. Unlike other natural disasters such as earthquakes or hurricanes, where the intensity of the natural event cannot be influenced, the intensity of wildland/wildland-urban interface fires can be reduced through responsible fuel management. Fuel treatments can change fire behavior, decrease fire size and intensity, divert fire away from high value resources, and can result in reduced suppression costs. When a wildfire starts within or burns into a fuel treatment area, an

assessment is conducted to evaluate the resulting impacts on fire behavior and fire suppression actions. Of over 1,400 assessments conducted to date, over 90 percent of the fuel treatments were effective in changing fire behavior and/or helping with control of the wildfire (USFS, Fuels Treatment Effectiveness Database).

There are many programs within the Forest Service that can reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fires. These include Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR), Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration, Hazardous Fuels, Federal and Cooperative Forest Health programs, Stewardship Contracting, Good Neighbor Authority, State Fire Assistance, and others. Approaches to restoring fire-adapted ecosystems often require treatment or removal of excess fuels (e.g., through mechanical thinning, prescribed fire, or a combination of the two) that reduce tree densities in uncharacteristically crowded forests, and application of fire to promote the growth of native plants and reestablish desired vegetation and fuel conditions.

Through our Hazardous Fuels Program, the Forest Service controls fuels by removing buildups of dead vegetation and by thinning overly dense forests that can be hazardous to lives, homes, communities, and wildland resources. From FY 2001 to FY 2013, the Forest Service treated about 33 million acres, an area larger than Mississippi. For FY 2015, we propose \$358.6 million for our Hazardous Fuels program. We also propose performing non-WUI Hazardous Fuels work within the IRR line item in order to accomplish work more efficiently. With more than 70,000 communities in the WUI at risk from wildfire, the Forest Service is working through cross-jurisdictional partnerships to help communities become safer from wildfires. Through the Firewise program, the number of designated Firewise communities rose from 400 in FY 2008 to nearly 1,000 in FY 2013.

The agency has the capability to protect life, property, and natural resources while assuring an appropriate, risk-informed, and effective response to wildfires that is consistent with land and resource management objectives. However, we cannot do this alone. Wildland fires are managed by the Federal Government, State, Tribal and local governments. The Forest Service and Department of Interior (DOI) alone cannot prevent the loss of life and property. Research demonstrates that the characteristics of a structure's surroundings within 100 feet principally determine the potential for ignition from the thermal radiation emitted by a fire. To improve the survivability of structures, the Forest Service and DOI work with State and local governments to develop and implement community protection plans. In addition, the Forest Service targets hazardous fuels funding to areas with the highest impact which often includes near communities that have already taken steps to reduce fire risk. Forest Service programs, including the State Fire and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs, and the Federal and Cooperative Forest Health Protection programs provide important assistance to States, local communities and non-Federal landowners in responding to, preparing for, and mitigating the threat of wildland fire.

#### IMPACTS OF INCREASED FIRE COSTS

In FY 1991, fire activities accounted for about 13 percent of the total agency budget; in FY 2012, it was over 40 percent. In the 1980s and 1990s, the 10-year average of suppression costs remained relatively stable, as did the number of acres burned nationwide. This was an abnormally wet period in the United States and fire activity was relatively low. However, beginning in the extreme fire season of 2000, which cost \$1 billion in suppression, this trend started to change. The cost of the FY 2000 fires alone caused the 10-year average to rise by over \$80 million—a 16 percent increase. Wildland Fire Management now makes up almost half of the agency's discretionary budget. Funding fire suppression has presented budgetary challenges for the Forest Service including the need to budget less for non-fire programs in an effort to maintain funding for fire suppression.

Fire transfers from non-fire accounts occur when the agency has exhausted all available fire resources from the Suppression and FLAME accounts. From FY 2000 to FY 2013, the Forest Service made fire transfers from discretionary, trust, and permanent non-fire accounts to pay for fire suppression costs seven times, ranging from \$100 million in FY 2007 to \$999 million in FY 2002, and totaling approximately \$3.2 billion. Of the total transferred funds, \$2.8 billion was repaid, however, the transfers still led to disruptions within all Forest Service programs. In FY 2013, the Forest Service transferred \$505 million to the fire suppression and preparedness accounts for emergency fire suppression due to severe burning conditions and increasing fire suppression costs. We greatly appreciate the repayment of these transferred funds provided by Congress as part of the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2014.

Each time the agency transfers money out of non-fire accounts to pay for fire suppression there are significant and lasting impacts across the entire Forest Service. When funding is transferred from other programs to support fire suppression operations, these non-fire programs are impacted because they are unable to accomplish priority work and achieve the overall mission of the agency. Often this priority work mitigates wildland fire hazards in future years. In addition, transfers negatively impact local businesses and economies, costing people jobs and income as a result of delayed or cancelled projects.

The FY 2010 Appropriations Act, Public Law 111-88, Title V-FLAME Act requires the Forest Service to report estimates of anticipated wildland fire suppression costs for each fiscal year. The July 2014 forecast predicts that with 90 percent confidence fire suppression costs will be between \$924 million and \$1.61 billion for FY 2014, with a median forecast of \$1.27 billion. If the FY 2014 fire season tracks those from the past, we would expect to transfer money from critical mission delivery activities, including fuels reduction and forest thinning projects that reduce the threat of wildfires as well as several of our permanent and trust funds. In his request for emergency supplemental appropriations for the humanitarian situation in the Southwest, the President has included \$615 million to provide for the necessary expenses for wildfire suppression and rehabilitation activities this fiscal year in order to avoid transferring funds from other wildfire treatment and protection activities. In addition, the President's supplemental request includes language to support a discretionary cap adjustment to allow the Federal Government to respond to severe, complex and threatening fires or a severe fire season similar to how other natural disasters are funded.

#### FIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING PROPOSAL

The FY 2015 Budget proposes a new funding strategy that recognizes the negative effects of funding fire suppression as we have historically. The budget proposes funding catastrophic wildland fires similar to other disasters. Funded in part by additional budget authority provided through a budget cap adjustment for wildfire suppression, the budget proposes discretionary funding for wildland fire suppression at a level which reflects the level of spending associated with suppression of 99 percent of wildfires. In addition, the budget includes up to \$954 million to be available under a disaster funding cap adjustment to meet suppression needs above the base appropriation. This proposed funding level includes the difference between the funds appropriated and the upper limit of the 90th percentile range forecast for suppression costs for FY 2015. This additional funding would be accessed with Secretarial declaration of need or imminent depletion of appropriated discretionary funds. This strategy provides increased certainty in addressing growing fire suppression needs, better safeguards non-suppression programs from transfers that diminish their effectiveness, and allows us to stabilize and invest in programs that more effectively restore forested landscapes, treat forests for the increasing effects of climate change, and prepare communities in the WUI for future wildfires.

#### WILDLAND FIRE AVIATION ASSETS

Airtankers are a critical part of our response to wildfire. Their use plays a crucial role in keeping some fires small and greatly assists in controlling the large fires. Accordingly, we are implementing a Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy to replace our aging fleet with next-generation airtankers. Our strategy, reflected in our budget request, would fund both the older aircraft still in operation and the next-generation airtankers currently under contract.

The Forest Service expects to have a sufficient number of large airtankers available through exclusive use contracts this fire season. This includes a total of up to nine Next Generation airtankers and eight Legacy airtankers. The Forest Service will also have 15 to 17 other airtankers available through agreements with cooperators, including eight military C-130s equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems, eight CV580s through agreements with the State of Alaska and Canada, and one Very Large Airtanker (DC-10) through a Call When Needed contract.

#### CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Our evolving approach to managing wildland fire is integral to meeting our goals of safety, landscape-scale restoration, cross-boundary landscape conservation, and risk management. We continue to learn more about wildland fire, and we continue to apply what we learn through fire and risk management science in partnership with States, communities, and other Federal agencies. We strive to maximize our response capabilities and to support community efforts to reduce the threat of wildfire and increase ecosystem resilience. The agency has made great progress in its

continued focus on risk-based decision-making when responding to wildfires, and in 2015 will continue this important work to better inform decision makers on the risks and trade-offs associated with wildfire management decisions.

ADDENDUM.—STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL, CHIEF, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
FOREST SERVICE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES CONCERNING PRESIDENT'S FISCAL YEAR 2015  
PROPOSED BUDGET FOR THE USDA FOREST SERVICE

*April 2, 2014.*

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's Budget request for the Forest Service for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015. I appreciate the support this subcommittee has shown for the Forest Service in the past, and in particular, thank you for your hard work on the FY 2014 Appropriations Act. When I testified before you last year, there were a number of important authorities, like stewardship contracting and good neighbor authority, which were set to soon expire. Thanks to the hard work of Congress on the 2014 Appropriations Act and the 2014 Farm Bill, we are in a much better position this year. I look forward to continuing to work together with members of the Committee to ensure that stewardship of our Nation's forests and grasslands continues to meet the desires and expectations of the American people. I am confident that this budget will allow the Forest Service to meet this goal while demonstrating fiscal restraint, efficiency, and cost-effective spending.

The FY 2015 President's Budget for the Forest Service focuses on three key areas: restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fires. It calls for a fundamental change in how wildfire suppression is funded. It proposes a new and fiscally responsible funding strategy for wildland fire, contributes to long-term economic growth, and continues our efforts to achieve the greatest benefits for the taxpayer at the least cost. This budget will enable us to more effectively reduce fire risk, manage landscapes more holistically, and increase resiliency of the Nation's forests and rangelands as well as the communities that border them.

The President's 2015 Budget also includes a separate, fully paid for \$56 billion Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative (OGS Initiative). The Initiative identifies additional discretionary investments that can spur economic progress, promote opportunity, and strengthen national security. The OGS Initiative includes funding for Forest Service programs. The OGS Initiative includes \$18 million for Research and Development and would focus on energy security and national economic stability while simultaneously addressing our conservation and restoration goals. In addition, the OGS Initiative includes \$61 million for Facilities and Trails to provide essential infrastructure maintenance and repair to sustain the benefits of existing infrastructure as domestic investments to grow our economy.

As part of the President's Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative and a permanent legislative proposal, the Forest Service would also have the opportunity to compete for conservation and infrastructure project funding included within the Centennial initiative. The Centennial initiative supporting the 100th Anniversary of the National Park Service, features a competitive opportunity for the public land management bureaus within the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service to address conservation and infrastructure project needs. The program would be managed within Interior's Office of the Secretary in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture with clearly defined project criteria. The Administration proposes \$100 million for the National Park Service anniversary's Centennial Land Management Investment Fund, as part of the Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative and \$100 million for conservation and infrastructure projects annually for three years as part of a separate legislative proposal.

The Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative also includes a \$1 billion Climate Resilience Fund. A portion of this funding source allows us to continue to invest in research to better understand the projected impacts of climate change and how we can better prepare our communities and infrastructure. The Fund would also serve to fund breakthroughs in technologies and resilient infrastructure development that will make us more resilient in the face of changing climate. The Fund proposal includes three Forest Service programs: an increase of \$50 million for State Fire Assistance Grants to increase the number of communities that are "Firewise" and the number of communities implementing building codes and building protection requirements, resulting in increased protection of communities, their residents and private property; an increase of \$50 million for IRR and Hazardous Fuels to

enhance support for public lands managers to manage landscape and watershed planning for increased resilience and risk reduction; and an increased \$25 million for Urban and Community Forestry to maintain, restore and improve urban forests mitigating heat islands and other climate change impact.

#### VALUE OF THE FOREST SERVICE

Our mission at the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Forest Service manages a system of national forests and grasslands totaling 193 million acres in 44 States and Puerto Rico, an area almost twice the size of California. These lands entrusted to our care provide some of the richest resources and most breathtaking scenery in the Nation, are the source of drinking water for millions of Americans, and support hundreds of thousands of jobs. Thousands of communities across the Nation depend on the national forests for their social well-being and economic prosperity.

Since our founding in 1905, as the Nation's leading forestry organization, we continue to serve Americans by supporting the sustainable stewardship of more than 600 million acres of non-Federal forest land across the Nation, including 423 million acres of private forest land, 69 million acres of State forest land, 18 million acres of Tribal forests, and over 100 million acres of urban and community forests. This commitment to sustainable forest management helps Americans use their lands while caring for them in ways that benefit them, their families, their communities, and the entire Nation.

We also maintain the largest forestry research organization in the world, with more than a century of discoveries in wood and forest products, fire behavior and management, and sustainable forest management. We are pursuing cutting-edge research in nanotechnology and green building materials, expanding markets for woody biomass. Land managers across the Nation use the results of our research to conserve forests, ensuring continuation of a full range of benefits for future generations.

America's forests, grasslands, and other open spaces are integral to the social, ecological, and economic well-being of the Nation. They play a vital role in providing public benefits such as clean air, clean water, mineral and energy production, and fertile soils for supporting timber, forage, carbon storage, food and fiber, fish and wildlife habitat, along with myriad opportunities for outdoor recreation. The Forest Service provides a valuable service to the public by restoring and improving our forest, grassland, and watershed health; by producing new knowledge through our research; and by providing financial and technical assistance to partners, including private forest landowners.

The benefits from Forest Service programs and activities include jobs and economic activity. Jobs and economic benefits stem not only from public use of the national forests and grasslands, but also from Forest Service management activities and infrastructure investments. We complete an economic analysis that calculated activities on the National Forest System contributed over \$36 billion to America's gross domestic product, and supported nearly 450,000 jobs during FY 2011.

Through our Job Corps and other programs including the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, we provide training and employment for America's youth, and we help veterans transition to civilian life. Our Urban and Community Forestry Program has provided jobs and career-training opportunities for underemployed adults and at-risk youth.

The Forest Service routinely leverages taxpayer funds by engaging partners who contribute to investments in land management projects and activities. In FY 2013, for example, we entered into more than 8,200 grants and agreements with partners who made a total of about \$540 million in cash and noncash contributions. Combined with our own contribution of nearly \$730 million, the total value of these partnerships was over \$1.27 billion.

Other noncommercial uses provide crucial benefits and services to the American people. Many Tribal members use the national forests and grasslands for hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods and other materials for personal use. They also use sacred sites on NFS lands for ritual and spiritual purposes.

National forests and grasslands attract about 160 million visits annually, and 55 percent of those visitors engage in strenuous physical activities. Based on studies showing that outdoor activities contribute to improved health and increased fitness, the availability of the Nation's forests and grasslands to all Americans provide other tangible benefits. In addition, since more than 83 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas where opportunities to experience nature are often reduced, the Forest Service has developed an array of programs designed to get people into the

woods, especially children. Each year, we reach an average of more than 5 million people with conservation education programs.

#### CHALLENGES TO CONSERVATION

Our Nation's forest and grassland resources continue to be at risk due to drought, uncharacteristically severe wildfire behavior, invasive species, and outbreaks of insects and disease. Although biodiversity remains high on national forests and grasslands, habitat degradation and invasive species pose serious threats to 27 percent of all forest-associated plants and animals, a total of 4,005 species.

The spread of homes and communities into wildfire-prone areas is an increasing management challenge. From 2000 to 2030, the United States could see substantial increases in housing density on 44 million acres of private forest lands nationwide, an area larger than North and South Carolina combined. More than 70,000 communities are now at risk from wildfire, and less than 15,000 have community wildfire protection plans.

This same growth and development is also reducing America's forest habitat and fragmenting what remains. From 2010 to 2060, the United States is predicted to lose up to 31 million acres of forested lands, an area larger than Pennsylvania.

Forest Service scientists predict that fire seasons could return to levels not seen since the 1940s, exceeding 12 to 15 million acres annually. Highlighting these concerns, for the first time since the 1950s, more than 7 million acres burned nationwide in 2000 and more than 9 million acres burned in 2012. In 2013, the largest fire ever recorded in the Sierra Nevada occurred, and a devastating blaze in Arizona killed 19 highly experienced firefighters.

#### BUDGET REQUEST AND FOCUS AREAS

To meet the challenges ahead, the Forest Service is focusing in three key areas: restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fires. We continue to implement cultural initiatives and cost savings measures focused on achieving a safer, more inclusive, and more efficient organization. To help us achieve these goals, the President's proposed overall budget for discretionary funding for the Forest Service in FY 2015 is \$4.77 billion. The Budget also proposes a new and fiscally responsible funding strategy for wildland fire that recognizes that catastrophic wildland fires should be considered disasters, funded in part by additional budget authority provided through a budget cap adjustment for wildland fire suppression. Combined with the funding for fire suppression in the discretionary request, this strategy will fully fund estimated wildfire suppression funding needs.

#### *Restoring Resilient Landscapes*

Our approach to addressing ecological degradation is to embark on efforts that support ecological restoration allowing for healthier more resilient ecosystems. In cooperation with our partners across shared landscapes, we continue to ensure that the Nation's forests and grasslands retain their ability to deliver the social, economic, and ecological values and benefits that Americans want and need now and for generations to come.

In February 2011, President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, setting forth a comprehensive agenda for conservation and outdoor recreation in the 21st century. In tandem with the President's initiative, Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack outlined an All Lands vision for conservation calling for partnerships and collaboration to reach shared goals for restoring healthy, resilient forested landscapes across all landownerships nationwide. In response, the Forest Service has launched an initiative to accelerate restoration across shared landscapes. The Accelerated Restoration Initiative builds on Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR), the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), the 2012 planning rule, and other restoration-related programs and initiatives to pick up the pace of ecological restoration while creating more jobs in rural communities. Our collaborative, holistic approach to restoring forest and grassland health relies on the State Forest Action Plans and the Forest Service's own Watershed Condition Framework to identify high-priority areas for restoration treatments.

In FY 2012, Congress authorized the Forest Service to pilot test the combination of multiple budget line items into a single line item for IRR. By combining funds from five budget line items we can better integrate and align watershed protection and restoration into all aspects of our management. In FY 2013, our integrated approach restored almost over 2,533,000 acres of forest and grassland, decommissioned 1,490 miles of roads, and restored 4,168 miles of stream habitat substantially improving conditions across 12 entire watersheds across the NFS. Given the success

demonstrated in the three pilot regions, we propose fully implementing IRR across the entire Forest Service in FY 2015. We propose a national IRR budget of \$820 million. Investing in IRR in FY 2015 is expected to result in 2,700,000 watershed acres treated, 3.1 billion board feet of timber volume sold, approximately 2,000 miles of road decommissioned, and 3,262 miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced. An estimated 26 watersheds will be restored to a higher condition class in FY 2015.

CFLRP was created in 2009 to help restore high-priority forested landscapes, improve forest health, promote job stability, create a reliable wood supply, and to reduce firefighting risks across the United States. The Secretary of Agriculture selected 23 large-scale projects for 10-year funding. Although the projects are mostly on NFS land, the collaborative nature of the program ties communities to local forest landscapes, engaging them in the work needed to restore the surrounding landscapes and watersheds. We propose to increase authorization for this successful collaborative program in the FY 2015 President's Budget. We propose to increase the program authorization to \$80 million and are requesting \$60 million in FY 2015 to continue implementation of the current 23 projects and for inclusion of additional projects. All of the existing projects are on track to meet their 10-year goals, and to date, more than 588,461 acres of wildlife habitat have been improved, while generating 814 million board feet of timber and 1.9 million green tons of biomass for energy production and other uses.

To gain efficiencies in our planning efforts, the Forest Service is moving forward with implementing a new land management planning rule. The new rule requires an integrated approach to forest plan preparation and multilevel monitoring of outcomes that allows for adaptive management, improved project implementation, and facilitated landscape scale restoration. We are also working to be more efficient in our environmental analyses under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) through development of three restoration-related categorical exclusions promoting hydrologic, aquatic, and landscape restoration approved in 2013. Other investments in "Electronic Management of NEPA" (eMNEPA) have significantly reduced administrative costs; we estimate that we save approximately \$17 million each year because of these investments. Collectively, these efforts will help land managers to focus on collaborative watershed restoration efforts that also promote jobs and economic opportunities in rural communities.

#### *Building Thriving Communities*

The Forest Service works to build thriving communities across the Nation by helping urban communities reconnect with the outdoors, by expanding the benefits that both rural and urban residents get from outdoor recreation, and by providing communities with the many economic benefits that result from sustainable multiple-use management of the national forests and grasslands.

Through our Recreation, Wilderness and Heritage program, we are dedicated to serving tens of millions of recreation visitors each year. Rural communities rely on the landscapes around them for hunting, fishing, and various amenities; the places they live are vital to their identity and social well-being. We maintain these landscapes for the character, settings, and sense of place that people have come to expect, such as popular trail corridors and viewsheds.

In support of the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative and the First Lady's "Let's Move" initiative, we are implementing a Framework for Sustainable Recreation. The framework is designed to ensure that people of all ages and from every socioeconomic background have opportunities to visit their national forests and grasslands-and, if they wish, to contribute through volunteer service. We focus on sustaining recreational and heritage-related activities on the National Forest System for generations to come. That includes maintaining and rehabilitating historic buildings and other heritage assets for public use, such as campgrounds and other historic facilities built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

A significant portion of our budget to sustain operations for outdoor recreation—roughly 20 percent—comes from fees collected under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), of the fees collected, 95 percent are locally reinvested to maintain and restore the facilities and services for outdoor recreation that people want and need. We propose permanent authority for the FLREA while clarifying its provisions and providing more consistency among agencies. This is an interagency proposal with the Department of the Interior.

For decades, the Forest Service has focused on protecting and restoring critical forested landscapes, not only on the national forests, but also on non-Federal lands. All 50 States and Puerto Rico prepared comprehensive State Forest Action Plans identifying the forested landscapes most in need of protection and restoration. Based on the State plans, the Forest Service has been working with State and other part-



ners to tailor our programs accordingly, applying our limited resources to the most critical landscapes.

In FY 2014, we began building on our successful State and Private Forestry Redesign initiative through a new program called Landscape Scale Restoration. The program allows States to continue pursuing innovative, landscape-scale projects across the Forest Health Management, State Fire Assistance, Forest Stewardship, and Urban and Community Forestry programs without the limitation of a specific mix of program funding. The program is designed to capitalize on the State Forest Action Plans to target the forested areas most in need of restoration treatments while leveraging partner funds. We propose funding the new program at almost \$24 million.

We are also using the State Forest Action Plans to identify and conserve forests critical for wildlife habitat and rural jobs through our Forest Legacy Program. Working through the States, we provide working forests with permanent protection by purchasing conservation easements from willing private landowners. As of February 2014, the Forest Legacy Program had protected more than 2.36 million acres of critical working forests, benefiting rural Americans in 42 States and Puerto Rico.

We propose \$53 million in discretionary funding for Forest Legacy and \$47 million in mandatory funds, from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), for a total of \$100 million. The increase is a key component of the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative to conserve critical landscapes and reconnect Americans to the outdoors through reauthorizing the LWCF as fully mandatory funds in FY 2016.

In a similar vein, our Land Acquisition Program is designed to protect critical ecosystems and prevent habitat fragmentation. In accordance with the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative, we worked with the Department of the Interior to establish a Federal interagency Collaborative Landscape Planning Program, designed to leverage our joint investments and coordinate our efforts to protect intact, functioning ecosystems across entire landscapes. Land acquisitions are a proven value for the taxpayer, making it easier and less expensive for people to access their public lands and easier and less expensive for the Forest Service to manage and restore the lands entrusted to our care. An analysis by The Trust for Public Land showed that every \$1 invested in Federal land acquisition returns \$4 to the taxpayer; taking returns beyond 10 years into account, the benefits are even greater.

The President's FY 2015 budget proposes \$51 million in discretionary funding for our Federal Land Acquisition program and almost \$76.7 million in mandatory funding from the LWCF, for a combined total of \$127.7 million. These mandatory funds are part of the President's proposed LWCF reauthorization with fully mandatory funds starting in FY 2016.

Working with the Department of the Interior, we propose to permanently authorize annual mandatory funding, without further appropriation or fiscal year limitation for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture LWCF programs beginning in fiscal year 2015. Starting in 2016, \$900 million annually in permanent funds would be available. During the transition to full permanent funding in 2015, the budget proposes \$900 million in total LWCF funding, comprised of \$550 million in permanent and \$350 million discretionary funds.

Another legislative proposal listed in our FY 2015 budget is an amendment to the Small Tracts Act to provide land conveyance authority for small parcels, less than 40 acres, to help resolve encroachments or trespasses. Proceeds from the sale of National Forest System lands under this proposed authority would be collected under the Sisk Act and used for future acquisitions and/or enhancement of existing public lands.

We are also helping communities use their wood resources for renewable energy. Through the Forest Service's Woody Biomass Utilization Grants Program, we are funding grants to develop community wood-to-energy plans and to acquire or upgrade wood-based energy systems and in FY 2013, State and Private Forestry awarded ten biomass grant awards totaling almost \$2.5 million to small businesses and community groups. In an interagency effort with the Rural Utilities Service, Rural Housing Service, and Rural Business-Cooperative Service within USDA Rural Development and the Farm Service Agency, the USDA Wood to Energy Initiative synergistically facilitates achievement of the cooperating agencies' goals. The Forest Service leverages its small amount of grant funds with the Rural Development's grant and loan programs by providing subject matter expertise and technical assistance in the early stages of project development, so the proponents can successfully compete for Rural Development's loans and grants. Our goal is lower energy bills, greater rural prosperity, and better environmental outcomes overall.

Better environmental outcomes result, in part, from removing woody materials to restore healthy, resilient forested landscapes. Many of the materials we remove

have little or no market value, and by finding new uses for them through our Research and Development Programs, we can get more work done, producing more jobs and community benefits. Our Bioenergy and Biobased Products Research Program is leading the way in researching wood-based energy and products. Through discoveries made at our Forest Products Lab, woody biomass can now be used to develop cross-laminated timber for building components such as floors, walls, ceilings, and more. Completed projects have included the use of cross-laminated panels for 10-story high-rise buildings.

Over 83 percent of America's citizens now live in urban areas. For most Americans, their main experience of the outdoors comes from their local tree-lined streets, greenways, and parks, not to mention their own backyards. Fortunately, America has over 100 million acres of urban forests, an area the size of California. Through our Urban and Community Forestry Program, the Forest Service has benefited more than 7,000 communities, home to 196 million Americans, helping people reap the benefits they get from trees, including energy conservation, flood and pollution control, climate change mitigation, and open spaces for improved quality of life.

We are expanding our work with cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, working with an array of partners in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership to restore watersheds in urban areas. We are also helping communities acquire local landscapes for public recreation and watershed benefits through our Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, which is funded at \$1.7 million in the FY 2015 President's Budget. Our goal is to help create a Nation of citizen-stewards committed to conserving their local forests and restoring them to health for all the benefits they get from them.

Our community focus supports the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative to achieve landscape-scale restoration objectives, connect more people to the outdoors, and support opportunities for outdoor recreation while providing jobs and income for rural communities. Building on existing partnerships, we have established a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to help us increase the number of work and training opportunities for young people and veterans while accomplishing high-priority conservation and restoration work on public lands.

#### *Managing Wildland Fires*

The Administration has worked this year to analyze and develop a strategy to address catastrophic fire risk. The Budget calls for a change in how wildfire suppression is funded in order to reduce fire risk, to more holistically manage landscapes, and to increase the resiliency of the Nation's forests and rangelands and the communities that surround them. The cost of suppression has grown from 13 percent of the agency's budget just 10 years ago to over 40 percent in 2014. This increase in the cost of wildland fire suppression is subsuming the agency's budget and jeopardizing its ability to implement its full mission. The growth in the frequency, size, and severity of fires in recent years; along with the continual expansion of the wildland urban interface (WUI) have all increased the risks of catastrophic fires to life and property. Collectively these factors have resulted in suppression costs that exceeded amounts provided in annual appropriations requiring us to transfer funds from other programs to cover costs. This shift in funding is creating a loss in momentum for critical restoration and other resource programs as fire transfers deplete the budget by up to \$500 million annually.

The FY 2015 Budget proposes a new funding strategy that recognizes the negative effects of funding fire suppression as we have historically. The budget proposes funding catastrophic wildland fires similar to other disasters. Funded in part by additional budget authority provided through a budget cap adjustment for wildfire suppression, the budget proposes discretionary funding for wildland fire suppression at a level equal to 70 percent of the estimated 10-year average suppression costs, which reflects the level of spending associated with suppression of 99 percent of wildfires. In addition, the budget includes up to \$954 million to be available under a disaster funding cap adjustment to meet suppression needs above the base appropriation. This proposed funding level includes 30 percent of the 10-year average of fire suppression costs and the difference to the upper limit of the 90th percentile range forecast for suppression costs for FY 2015. This additional funding would be accessed with Secretarial declaration of need or imminent depletion of appropriated discretionary funds. This strategy provides increased certainty in addressing growing fire suppression needs, better safeguards non-suppression programs from transfers that diminish their effectiveness, and allows us to stabilize and invest in programs that more effectively restore forested landscapes, treat forests for the increasing effects of climate change, and prepare communities in the WUI for future wildfires.

Our evolving approach to managing wildland fire is integral to meeting our goals of safety, landscape-scale restoration, cross-boundary landscape conservation, and risk management. We continue to learn more about wildland fire, and we continue to apply what we learn through fire and risk management science in partnership with States, communities, and other Federal agencies. We strive to maximize our response capabilities and to support community efforts to reduce the threat of wildfire and increase ecosystem resilience. The agency has made great progress in its continued focus on risk-based decision-making when responding to wildfires, and in 2015 will continue this important work to better inform decision makers on the risks and trade-offs associated with wildfire management decisions. The Budget also furthers efforts to focus hazardous fuels treatments on 1.4 million WUI acres focused on high priority areas identified in Community Wildfire Protection Plans.

Through our Hazardous Fuels Program, the Forest Service controls fuels by removing buildups of dead vegetation and by thinning overly dense forests that can be hazardous to lives, homes, communities, and wildland resources. From FY 2001 to FY 2013, the Forest Service treated about 33 million acres, an area larger than Mississippi. For FY 2015, we propose \$358.6 million for our Hazardous Fuels program. We also propose performing non-WUI Hazardous Fuels work within the IRR line item in order to accomplish work more efficiently. With more than 70,000 communities in the WUI at risk from wildfire, the Forest Service is working through cross-jurisdictional partnerships to help communities become safer from wildfires. Through the Firewise program, the number of designated Firewise communities rose from 400 in FY 2008 to nearly 1,000 in FY 2013.

Our Hazardous Fuels program is also designed to help firefighters manage wildfires safely and effectively, and where appropriate, to use fire for resource benefits. Our Preparedness program is designed to help us protect lives, property, and wildland resources through an appropriate, risk-based response to wildfires. Preparedness has proven its worth; Fire Program Analysis, a strategic management tool, shows that every \$1.00 subtracted from preparedness funding adds \$1.70 to suppression costs because more fires escape to become large and large fires are more expensive to suppress. Unless we maintain an adequate level of preparedness, we risk substantial increases in overall fire management costs.

Airtankers are a critical part of our response to wildfire. Their use plays a crucial role in keeping some fires small and greatly assists in controlling the large fires. Accordingly, we are implementing a Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy to replace our aging fleet with next-generation airtankers. Our strategy, reflected in our budget request, would fund both the older aircraft still in operation and the next-generation airtankers currently under contract. It would also cover required cancellation fees and the C-130 Hercules aircraft transferred by the U.S. Coast Guard.

#### SAFETY AND INCLUSION

In addition to our focus on restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and managing wildland fire, we continue our agency efforts to become a safer, more diverse, and more inclusive organization.

Accomplishing our work often takes us into high-risk environments. For that reason, for several years now, we have undertaken a learning journey to become a safer organization. Every one of our employees has taken training to become more attuned to safety issues and the need to manage personal risk. As part of this effort, safety means recognizing the risk and managing it appropriately. Our goal is to become a zero-fatality organization through a constant, relentless focus on safety.

Recognizing that more than 83 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas, the Forest Service is outreaching to urban and underserved communities to introduce more people to opportunities to get outdoors, to participate in NFS land management, and to engage in conservation work in their own communities. Part of this inclusiveness is creating new opportunities to come into contact with and to hiring individuals from various backgrounds that might not otherwise be exposed to other Forest Service programs.

#### COST SAVINGS

The Forest Service is committed to achieving the greatest benefits for the taxpayer at the least cost. Mindful of the need for savings, we have taken steps to cut operating costs. Taking advantage of new technologies, we have streamlined and centralized our financial, information technology, and human resources operations to gain efficiencies and save costs. We continue to work with other USDA agencies under the Blueprint for Stronger Service to develop strategies for greater efficiencies in key business areas. In FY 2013, we saved millions of dollars through additional measures to promote efficiencies, ranging from an \$800,000 annual savings through

consolidation of local telephone service accounts to right-sizing our existing Microsoft software licenses, which yielded over \$4 million in savings in FY 2013. In FY 2013, we also instituted measures that will yield \$100 million in cost pool savings by FY 2015.

Another cost saving highlight is the Forest Service completion of the design and construction for the renovation of the Yates Building on schedule, and within budget. On January 13, 2014, following completion of the renovation, all 762 Washington Office located employees apart from International Programs were finally located in the same building. Beside these benefits, this move is expected to save \$5 million annually in leasing costs.

#### FUTURE OUTLOOK

For more than a century, the Forest Service has served the American people by making sure that their forests and grasslands deliver a full range of values and benefits. America receives enormous value from our programs and activities, including hundreds of thousands of jobs and annual contributions to the economy worth many times more than our entire annual discretionary budget. Especially in these tough economic times, Americans benefit tremendously from investing in Forest Service programs and activities.

Now we are facing some of the greatest challenges in our history. Invasive species, climate change effects, regional drought and watershed degradation, fuel buildups and severe wildfires, habitat fragmentation and loss of open space, and devastating outbreaks of insects and disease all threaten the ability of America's forests and grasslands to continue delivering the ecosystem services that Americans want and need. In response, the Forest Service is increasing the pace and scale of ecological restoration. We are working to create healthy, resilient forest and grassland ecosystems capable of sustaining and delivering clean air and water, habitat for wildlife, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and many other benefits.

Our budget request focuses on the public's highest priorities for restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and safely managing wildland fire while providing an effective emergency response. Our requested budget will enable us to address the growing extent and magnitude of our management challenges and the mix of values and benefits that the public expects from the national forests and grasslands. We will continue to lead the way in improving our administrative operations for greater efficiency and effectiveness in mission delivery. Our research will continue to solve complex problems by creating innovative science and technology for the protection, sustainable management, and use of all forests, both public and private, for the benefit of the American people. Moreover, we are working ever more effectively to optimize our response to cross-cutting issues by integrating our programs and activities.

We can achieve these priorities through partnerships and collaboration. Our budget priorities highlight the need to strengthen service through cooperation, collaboration, and public-private partnerships that leverage our investments to reach shared goals. Through strategic partnerships, we can accomplish more work while also yielding more benefits for all Americans, for the sake of all generations to come.

This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the Committee Members have for me.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

Ms. Thorsen.

#### **STATEMENT OF KIM THORSEN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC SAFETY, RESOURCE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

Ms. THORSEN. Chairwoman Landrieu, Ranking Member Murkowski and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Interior's readiness for the 2014 wild land fire season. I've submitted my prepared statement for the record and would like to just make a few opening comments.

The National Wildfire potential outlook issued for the period of July through September predicts above normal fire for July over much of California, the Northwest and the Great Basin. In August

we expect California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Idaho will continue to experience above normal fire potential.

Drought is forecasted to persist or worsen over much of the Southwestern quarter of the Nation with exceptional drought continuing in California, Western Nevada and a large portion of the Southern plains.

The Department has nearly 5,000 firefighters and support personnel to deploy this season. We have three, 3 single engine air tankers on exclusive use contracts and an additional 38 on on call when needed contracts. Additionally we have helicopters and water skippers available.

Appropriations for the 2014 wild land fire budget total 861 million, including 378 million for suppression and FLAME funds.

Drought conditions across the West, changing climate, invasive species and longer, hotter fire seasons make it a challenge to plan for and budget for firefighting. What we need is a long term, sustainable wild land fire budget framework that recognizes the unpredictability of fire and treats it as an emergency, like tornadoes and hurricanes.

We greatly appreciate the leadership of Senators Wyden and Crapo as well as Congressmen Simpson and Schrader and all of the supporting co-sponsors in putting forth such a sustainable framework. The 2015 budget proposal for Interior and the Forest Service models this approach.

The 2015 budget request for the wild land fire management program is \$794 million which will allow the Department of the Interior to fund ongoing level of normal firefighting, fuels management, burned area rehabilitation, science and facilities maintenance. An additional \$240 million is requested as the cap adjustment.

The budget proposal is designed to provide stable funding for fire suppression while minimizing the adverse impacts of fire transfers on the budgets of other fire and non-fire programs as well as reduce fire risk, manage landscapes more comprehensively and increase the resiliency of public lands in the communities that border them.

In this proposed new budget framework a portion of the funding needed for suppression response is funded within the discretionary spending limits. A portion is funded in an adjustment to those limits.

For Interior, \$268.6 million is requested within the current budget cap which is 70 percent of the 10-year suppression average spending. This base level funding ensures that the cap adjustment will only be used for the most severe fire activity which constitutes approximately 1 percent of all fires and 30 percent of the costs. This approach would provide funding certainty in future years for firefighting costs, maintain fiscal responsibility by addressing wild-fire disaster needs through agreed upon funding mechanisms and free up resources to invest in areas that will promote long term forest and rangeland health and reduce fire risk.

In addition our request does not increase overall discretionary spending as it would reduce the ceiling for the existing disaster relief cap adjustment by an equivalent amount as is provided for wildfire suppression operations.

The request includes a 30 million dollar increase to establish a new, resilient landscapes activity to improve the integrity and resilience of forest and range lands by restoring and maintaining landscapes to specific conditions for fire resiliency. Treatments will be strategically placed across landscapes including outside of the wild land urban interface where ecosystems, structure and function is threatened by wildfire and other disturbances.

The fuels management program uses a risk based approach that focuses on 3 strategic issues including the nature and extent of the fuels problems in terms of risk of wildfire to key values, determination of treatment and funding priorities based on those risks and measurement of accomplishment of program success in terms of reduction of those risks. More resilient, healthier ecosystems provide many benefits to society including clean water, scenic and recreation values, wood products and biodiversity.

Communities are better able to withstand wildfire and treatments provide safer conditions and more strategic options for firefighters.

Together with all of our available resources we will continue to provide a safe, effective wild land fire program. We will continue to improve effectiveness, cost efficiency, safety and community and resource protection.

This concludes my statement. Thank you for your interest in the Department's wild land fire program and for the opportunity to testify before this committee. I welcome any questions you may have and appreciate your continued support.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Thorsen follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KIM THORSEN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, PUBLIC SAFETY, RESOURCE PROTECTION, AND EMERGENCY SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

#### INTRODUCTION

Chairman Landrieu, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Department of the Interior's readiness for the 2014 wildland fire season. The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), along with the Forest Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is prepared for the 2014 wildland fire season with our available resources.

#### 2013 WILDFIRE SEASON

In the 2013 calendar year, nationally, nearly 51,000 fires were reported and over 4.3 million acres burned, which represents 65 percent and 59 percent of the 10-year averages, respectively. Alaska led the nation with 1.3 million acres burned. The Eastern Great Basin burned the most acres in the lower 48 states consuming nearly 768,000 acres. Over 2,100 structures were destroyed by wildfires in 2013, below the annual average of nearly 2,700. California accounted for the highest number of structures lost.

The available funding before transfers and reprogrammings for suppression in FY 2013 was \$368 million including the FLAME funding. The DOI obligations in FY 2013 were \$399.2 million which required Section 102 transfers to cover the balance needed. The transfers were from within the Wildland Fire Management accounts of Fuels, Preparedness and Burned Area Rehabilitation, as well as other DOI bureau accounts mainly Construction and Land Acquisition. Repayment of these impacted bureau resource accounts occurred in FY 2014.

The 2013 fire season was anything but normal when we reflect on the numbers of lives lost during the season. In total, 34 wildland Federal/state/local firefighters died in the line of duty. This number, second only to the fire season of 1910 when 84 firefighters perished, was tied with 1994, the year in which 14 firefighters died in the South Canyon Fire on Storm King Mountain in Colorado.

Loss of life leaves a mark not only on the families and friends of the fallen firefighters, but the loss resounds through the entire wildland fire community. Some particularly tragic fire seasons stand out in our history and continue to greatly influence the work we do every day. This calendar year, the wildland firefighting community commemorated two significant anniversaries that were marked by historic loss to the interagency wildland fire management community—the anniversaries of the South Canyon (July 6, 1994) and the Yarnell Hill (June 30, 2013) incidents.

#### 2014 FIRE SEASON OUTLOOK

The 2014 fire season is expected to be similar to last year's. The National Wildfire Potential Outlook issued by the Predictive Services Unit at the National Interagency Fire Center for the period of July through October predicts above-normal fire potential for July over much of California, the Northwest, and the Great Basin.

In August, we expect California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho will continue to experience above-normal fire potential with the possibility of above-normal fire activity across the New England states and the Four Corners area if short-term weather develops that would support fire outbreaks.

Above-normal fire potential is predicted to remain over Southern and Central California through September and October; but Northern California, Oregon, and Washington should return to normal.

The impacts of climate change, cumulative drought effects, increasing risk in and around communities, and escalating emergency response requirements continue to impact wildland fire management and wildfire response operations. Drought is forecasted to persist or worsen over much of the southwestern quarter of the nation with exceptional drought continuing in California, western Nevada, and a large portion of the southern Plains.

Since the beginning of the calendar year, over 30,000 fires have burned more than 1 million acres, predominantly in the Southern, Eastern, Southwest, Northern and Southern California, and Alaska Geographic Areas of the country. The Northwest area has been unusually active for this time of the year. As of July 8, 2014, numbers of fires and acres burned represented 70 percent and 37 percent of normal, respectively.

#### EXPECTED AVAILABLE FIRE RESOURCES

Together with our partners at the U. S. Forest Service, we are well prepared for the 2014 fire season. The Department plans to deploy over 3,400 firefighters, including 143 smokejumpers, 17 Type-1 crews; 745 engines; more than 200 other pieces of heavy equipment (dozers, tenders, etc.); and about 1,300 support personnel (incident management teams, dispatchers, fire cache, etc.); totaling nearly 5,000 personnel.

The Department has been a leader in creating the Veterans to Wildland Fire program; and where possible, we will continue to emphasize the hiring of returning Veterans to fill the ranks of its firefighting forces.

This year, we have 33 single-engine airtankers or SEATS on exclusive use contracts and an additional 38 on call-when-needed contracts. SEATs are a good fit for the types of fires that the Interior agencies experience. Many of these fires usually burn at lower elevations, in sparser fuels, on flatter terrain. We also have small and large helicopters and water scoopers available. We will utilize Forest Service contracted heavy airtankers and, if necessary, Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) equipped C-130 aircraft from the Department of Defense. Agreements are in place to acquire supplemental aircraft from our state and international partners, if necessary.

Appropriations for the 2014 wildland fire budget total \$861 million including \$378 million for suppression and the FLAME funds. Recently the President sent forward a supplemental request for the Forest Service in the amount of \$615 million, which is the difference between the July FLAME forecast at the upper bound of the 90% confidence interval (\$1.6 billion) and their available suppression appropriation of \$995 million. Interior did not request funding in the supplemental because the upper bound of the July FLAME forecast 90% confidence projection is \$355 million, which is \$23 million below our appropriated amount. The FLAME projections are based on modeling and may change over time.

#### FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET

Drought conditions across the west, changing climate, invasive species, and longer/hotter fire seasons make it a challenge to plan for and budget for firefighting. What we need is a long term, sustainable wildland fire budget framework that recognizes the unpredictability of fire and treats it as an emergency like tornadoes and

hurricanes. We greatly appreciate the leadership of Senator's Wyden and Crapo, as well as Congressmen Simpson and Schrader, and all of the supporting co-sponsors, in putting forth a sustainable framework. This legislation recognizes that we need a better way to budget for wildland fire management suppression programs, while maintaining accountability and transparency in spending.

The 2015 budget proposal for Interior and the Forest Service models this approach. The 2015 budget request for the Wildland Fire Management Program is \$794.0 million, which will allow the Department to fund an ongoing level of "normal" firefighting, fuels management, burned area rehabilitation, science, and facilities maintenance. An additional \$240.4 million is requested as a cap adjustment.

The budget proposes to amend the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended, to establish a new budget framework for the Wildland Fire Management program that is designed to provide stable funding for fire suppression, while minimizing the adverse impacts of fire transfers on the budgets of other fire and non-fire programs, as well as reduce fire risk, manage landscapes more comprehensively, and increase the resiliency of public lands and the communities that border them.

In this proposed new budget framework, a portion of the funding needed for suppression response is funded within the discretionary spending limits, and a portion is funded in an adjustment to those limits. For Interior, \$268.6 million is requested within the current budget cap which is 70 percent of the 10-year suppression average spending. This base level funding ensures that the cap adjustment will only be used for the most severe fire activity which constitutes approximately one percent of all fires and 30 percent of the costs.

This approach would provide funding certainty in future years for firefighting costs, maintain fiscal responsibility by addressing wildfire disaster needs through agreed-upon funding mechanisms and free up resources to invest in areas that will promote long-term forest health and reduce fire risk. In addition, our request does not increase overall discretionary spending, as it would reduce the ceiling for the existing disaster relief cap adjustment by an equivalent amount as is provided for wildfire suppression operations.

The 2015 budget request includes a program increase of \$34.1 million for Preparedness. The increased funds will enhance Interior's readiness capabilities by strengthening preparedness capabilities. A major share of the Preparedness increase will be devoted to strengthening the BIA wildfire program by, among other things, funding contract support costs, providing workforce development opportunities for firefighters, and enhancing administrative support capabilities.

#### NATIONAL COHESIVE WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

In April, the Secretaries of the Department of the Interior and Agriculture released the National Cohesive Strategy and the National Action Plan bringing to a close the three-phased, collaborative approach to evaluate and address the nation's most significant wildland fire management issues, now and into the future. The goals of the National Cohesive Strategy are:

- Restore and maintain landscapes.—Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.
- Fire-Adapted communities.—Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.
- Wildfire response.—all jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.

The National Cohesive Strategy was developed and will be implemented in an inclusive process. This is both significant and distinct from past efforts. The outcome of the cohesive strategy effort is more than a set of documents; it is a commitment to the doctrine that as stakeholders, we all share responsibilities for managing our lands; protecting our nation's natural, tribal, cultural resources; and making our communities safe and resilient for future generations.

Across the nation, we recognize that the principles of the National Cohesive Strategy are already being implemented in some places. We need to continue and strengthen those existing efforts and partnerships that are working.

Wildland fire management must be an integrated program that works hand-in-hand with other natural resource, land use, and other program areas where we can achieve the most difference on the ground, together. It must be an integrated program that prioritizes efforts where there is an opportunity to work with our neighbors and partners who are taking action to collectively make the most difference.

The National Strategy recognizes this need for engagement and action at all levels, on behalf of Federal, state, local, territorial and Tribal governments, non-gov-



environmental partners, property owners, and public stakeholders. Our future success will be defined by our commitment and ability to work together to achieve the vision and goals of the National Cohesive Strategy; together, we are moving forward with implementation.

#### RESILIENT LANDSCAPES

The 2015 budget makes pro-active investments in fuels management and landscape resiliency to better address the growing impact of wildland fire on communities and the public lands.

The request includes a \$30.0 million increase to establish a new “Resilient Landscapes” activity to improve the integrity and resilience of forests and rangelands by restoring and maintaining landscapes to specific conditions for fire resiliency. Treatments will be strategically placed within landscapes, including outside of the wildland-urban interface (WUI) where ecosystem structure and function is threatened by wildfire and other disturbances.

Examples of treatments that will be conducted include thinning of overstocked stands in areas with critical wildlife habitat, removing trees encroaching on meadows or wetlands with significant resource value, and controlling fire-adapted invasive weeds that degrade habitat, compete with native vegetation, and increase the risk of wildfire. Importantly, the Resilient Landscapes activity will be coordinated with and supported by the resource management programs of the four Interior bureaus that participate in the Wildland Fire program. Bureaus will leverage funds to restore and maintain fire resilient landscapes.

#### FUELS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Department of the Interior’s hazardous fuels program has been redefined as the Department’s risk-based Fuels Management Program. The Fuels Management program uses a risk-based approach that focuses on three strategic issues, including the nature and extent of the fuels problem in terms of risk of wildfire to key values, primarily in the WUI; determination of treatment and funding priorities based on those risks; and measurement of accomplishment and program success in terms of reduction of those risks.

The risk-based fuels management program is aligned with the three goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy to improve the integrity and resilience of the forests and rangelands, contribute to community adaptation to fire, and improve our ability to safely and appropriately respond to wildfire.

More resilient, healthier ecosystems provide many benefits to society, including clean water, scenic, and recreation values, wood products, and biodiversity. Communities are better able to withstand wildfire and treatments provide safer conditions and more strategic options for firefighters.

We’ve seen examples where fuels treatments played an important role in managing the fires. This year a fire break on the border with Kenai National Wildlife Refuge protected an Alaskan community and helped firefighters contain the Funny River Fire. Crews working on the San Juan Fire on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona observed a significant change in fire behavior when the fire ran into a previous tree thinning project on the forest, and the crown fire dropped to a slow-moving ground fire, making the job for firefighters safer and easier to manage.

Last year, during the 2013 California Rim Fire in Yosemite National Park crews observed a big change in fire behavior due to tree thinning and prescribed fire work accomplished around several structures and infrastructure located in the Hodgdon Meadow’s area. The time gained by the reduced fire behavior allowed fire crews to protect NPS and taxpayer’s investments in this developed area with little to no damaging fire effects and no loss of structures.

Interior has targeted a research effort with the Joint Fire Science Program to characterize the effectiveness of fuels treatment on wildland fire behavior, costs, and resilience. Results of these studies will be incorporated into our Fuels Management Program.

#### PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM

Consistent with the Cohesive Strategy and similar to fuels management, we are continuing to develop a risk-based framework to develop and manage the Preparedness Program budget. The risk framework seeks to align Preparedness investments with fire risk relative to priority values such as life and property, natural/cultural/economic resources, and DOI lands in general rather than on historical allocations. Fire managers will be able to adjust allocations while considering current capability, return on investments, and workload/complexity. It will let us be adaptive and make

strategic decisions about placement of wildland firefighting resources with changing budgets and risk-profiles.

#### PARTNERSHIPS

The realities of today's challenges at federal, state and other levels highlights the importance of working together across landscapes, and with our partners to achieve our goals.

The Federal wildland fire agencies are working with Tribal, state, and local government partners to prevent and reduce the effects of large, unwanted fires through preparedness activities like risk assessment, prevention and mitigation efforts, mutual aid agreements, firefighter training, acquisition of equipment and aircraft, and dispatching firefighters, support personnel and equipment; community assistance and hazardous fuels reduction. These actions demonstrate Interior's continued commitment to the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (restore and maintain resilient landscapes, create fire-adapted communities, and response to wildfire).

#### CONCLUSION

Although the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) are offering separate written statements today, please be assured that our Departments work collaboratively in all aspects of wildland fire management, along with our other Federal, Tribal, state and local partners.

Together, with all our available resources, we will continue to provide a safe, effective wildland fire management program. We will continue to improve effectiveness, cost efficiency, safety, and community and resource protection.

This concludes my statement. Thank you for your interest in the Department's wildland fire management program and for the opportunity to testify before this Committee. I welcome any questions you may have and appreciate your continued support.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

For the benefit of the committee members the order after our questions will be Senator Heller, Senator Baldwin, Senator Flake, Senator Udall, Senator Barrasso, Senator Heinrich, Senator Risch.

Let me begin by asking both of you. Critics of the Wyden/Crapo legislation which the Administration does support, say that the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act is a blank check or even a slush fund. How would you respond to those charges and can you both underscore why you believe their approach is necessary?

Mr. TIDWELL. Madame Chairwoman, I'll start. But first I need to clarify that in our budget request which merits or basically follows this proposal. 99 percent of our fires, the cost of those fires, will still be covered in our appropriation. It's only that 1 percent that happens to equate often to about 30 percent of the cost that will be considered to be funded out of the Emergency Disaster Relief Funds.

So you're still going to have 99 percent of our programs still going to be part of our appropriation. It's just that 1 percent that will be disasters.

So this proposal what it does it stops fire transfer. It stops that disruptive practice. It provides a stable funding source and at the same time it does free up the potential for us to invest, to do more of the hazardous fuels work and to do more work to restore the health of our forests.

The CHAIR. Ms. Thorsen.

Ms. THORSEN. Thank you.

I would totally agree with what Tom has said. In addition we don't see it as a slush fund of any sort. Any funding that we receive in Interior and I'm sure in the Forest Service, we are held accountable for and transparent about.

So this, the funding proposal here, would in no way change how we are accountable for what we do. We are extremely cost efficient, always looking for effectiveness on the ground in firefighting activities, investment of fuels and so forth.

So in no way does this budget proposal, in any way, let us think that we have an endless amount of funding. We will be very accountable and very transparent about what we do with that funding.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

My next question is for you, Ms. Thorsen.

In my visit to Kisatchie, in my many visits to important sites in my State, I'm very clear that our business and industry and environmental groups work very well together. I'm not sure that is the case in other States, but I know that in Louisiana we have a pretty good coalition together.

We have an umbrella organization called Louisiana Prescribed Fire Council. Are you aware of this council's work or something like it? Can you tell us if there are lessons that you've learned for the cooperative work of this network? Should it be expanded to other parts of the country?

Are you aware of this coalition?

Ms. THORSEN. Yes, I am, actually. It's a group in Louisiana comprised of landowners, private landowners, NGO's, Federal/State/local governments, a whole host of folks that conduct prescribed fire activities and among themselves share all of that information in the State of Louisiana.

Their group, additionally, brings forth students from the prescribed fire training center. It's located in Tallahassee, Florida to the State of Louisiana, to learn about what lessons learned and those types of things that they do in Louisiana. That group, then, is also mirrored in the other Southeastern States.

So each of the States have a Prescribed Fire Council.

The CHAIR. Chief, let's talk about that because I've only got a minute.

The Southeast, our region, seems to have a pretty good model for prescribed burns, if we could get some funding for it, selling timber which is important for jobs and maintaining a healthy forest for recreation. I know there are differences between the Southeast and the Eastern part of the country and the West. I am understanding that the real emergency is in the West.

But maybe this could serve as a model. Can you just comment for 30 seconds or so, on this procedure or policy?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

You've seen the good work that's there done on the Kisatchie. It's an example of when we're able to use prescribed fire along with active timber management, we can restore the conditions of our forest to provide all the benefits, not only to provide for clean water, clean air, but also the wildlife habitat and at the same time to produce the wood products that could come off of that forest.

What we've been able to do throughout the South is to be able to recognize the importance of active management and especially the importance of being able to use prescribed fire. It's something that we're starting to be able to replicate across the country as

more and more people can see the benefits of being able to manage our forests for multiple use.

The CHAIR. I think just one of the points to underscore and the Westerners will agree with me. One of the reasons that it's working in the South is because the land is privately held. So the forward leaning of the land owner is really helping this.

What's happening in the West is the landowner is the Federal Government. It may not be leaning forward enough. So we've got to kind of explore this and we shall see from what our Westerners think.

But anyway it was a very interesting comment or review of this issue.

Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Madame Chairman.

Just following up on that.

I was out in Soldotna this weekend looking at the aftermath of the Funny River Fire. This was a fire that, I'm told, burned an area approximately the size of the city of Seattle. So it was substantial. A lot of concern about threats to private property, but the good news is that most escaped.

But there was a lot of discussion about the fact that the fire started on refuge land and whether or not there had been any level of active management. Some folks that felt that their properties were threatened were really quite agitated about the concerns that they had raised. We're going to be learning a little bit more, but you raise a very appropriate question there, Madame Chairman.

I want to go back to the Chairman's question about the issue of not giving the Forest Service a blank check, if you will, when we're talking about this budget cap proposal that is under discussion today. Chief, I'm not certain that you actually have these numbers, but getting these numbers is going to be important to this debate, important to how we find an end to fire borrowing.

That is how many actual acres of Forest Service lands was treated in this last fiscal year?

So what I'm looking for is a breakdown for that number. I think you know the reason why this is important. You were talking about some big numbers here, expensive wildfires, how we need to budget differently, including doing more thinning work and helping reduce the number of these big fires.

So what I would like you to give me are the acres that have been mechanically treated—

the acres mechanically treated using commercial timber harvest.

the acres treated with prescribed fires, like the Chairman has been talking about; and

the acres treated using other tools besides prescribed fire and mechanical thinning.

I think that would be very helpful for us as a committee as we try to understand because what I would like to do and where I think the Chairman is going certainly with our conversations here. We want to know that if, in fact, we move to a proposal like the Wyden/Crapo proposal that Forest Service doesn't now have increased discretion within their budget to go and do whatever it is that you may hope to do with that.

I would like to see some real active management. I would like to know, for a fact, that we're going to get some treatment into our forest lands so that we can work to reduce that.

So if you could get me those numbers I would appreciate it.

Let me ask, Chief, on the wildfire cap adjustment some have suggested that the budgeting and requesting 100 percent of the 10-year average isn't working. The suppression costs exceed these levels. We know that.

Have we looked to whether or not different methods to determine the budget request might be more accurate? I mean, are we using the same approach that we always have been and as a consequence our numbers are all off? Have we looked to whether or not there are different accounting methods that we might utilize?

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, we have looked at different methods. The concept of a 10-year average has been well accepted when it comes to budgeting. But the problem we have is that with the changed conditions and each year it seems like we're having a more active fire season, that 10-year average often, as has been pointed out, 8 out of the last 10 years, we've had to provide supplemental funding.

Senator MURKOWSKI. It doesn't work. Yes.

Mr. TIDWELL. So the other thing that we do as part of the FLAME Act, we submit a report to Congress every year. Then we predict, based on our regression model, what we think the next fire season is going to be.

But here's the problem. So in FY 2015 as part of our budget submission, we did run the progression model. It produces a range somewhere between \$770 million to \$1.9 billion. Within that range our scientists are 90 percent confident that the next year fire season is going to be there.

So as we move forward 8 or 9 months, we'll be able to shrink that down and be more accurate. But here's our challenge because we're now talking about the FY 2015 budget to be able to budget for a situation that's 6 to 8 months out and have that accuracy that's really needed. That's the challenge that we have.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So if that's the challenge.

Mr. TIDWELL. The regression model is another tool.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Are we looking to other models then? This is something that perhaps we don't have the answer to, but if we've acknowledged that this one isn't working it would sure seem to me that we ought to be, kind of, coming together to see what it is that might, perhaps, be a better predictor.

We all know that forest fires come and go. In some years you have really horrible years and others not so much. But we know that this one is not giving us the year accuracy that we need.

Madame Chairman, I know we're probably not going to get to a second round because of votes. But I just want the Chief to know I'm going to have a whole series of questions for the record that I would like you to address. Some continue about the wildfire cap adjustment, but I also have questions as they relate to aviation for firefighting and our NextGen firefighters.

I also have a very probing question about the NN float. It would not be a budget hearing if I did not bring up my discomfort with what is not going on in NN. I was out there over the Fourth of July

weekend. What you promised me last year has not been addressed. So I'd like to follow up with you.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Heller and then Senator Baldwin.

Senator HELLER. Madame Chair, thank you for this hearing and for the Ranking Member, I think it's long overdue. I want to thank our witnesses also for being here today and taking time from their busy schedule.

States like Nevada and most of us in the Western portions of this country clearly have a lot of lands that are run by the Federal Government whether it's BLM, Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife. So I think it's critical to hear from Forest Service today and the Department of Interior to get some feedback on what we can do appropriately to fight back, push back, on some of these wildfires.

One of the greatest challenges facing our Western forests and rangeland, as we've been talking all day, is the severity and the length of the fire season that we're faced with. Nevada is one of a handful of Western States that seemingly keeps enduring record breaking fire devastation year after year. From 2009 to 2013 wild land fires have burned over 1.2 million acres of Forest Service and BLM administered lands in my State.

In the last 3 years, in particular, have been devastating, 424,000 acres in 2011, 613,000 in 2012, 163,000 acres in 2013. So not telling you anything you don't already know. It's as big of an issue in Nevada as it is everywhere else.

In fact the Secretary of Agriculture has declared a drought disaster in all counties in the State of Nevada just as the other Senator from California had mentioned in her State. Surprisingly, unsurprisingly, the National Interagency Fire Center estimates the potential for wild land fires in August and September will remain high over California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. I'm assuming that Arizona is part of that also, Jeff.

Needless to say, multiple fires have already broken out in the State of Nevada. We just recently had the Hunters Falls fire burning southwest of Reno at a cost of \$800,000. Could have been much worse, but I think people under your jurisdiction did a tremendous job and those at BLM and local firefighters in suppressing that particular fire.

Here's the issue. This week the weather forecast throughout the week is that we'll have lightning storms throughout the State. So we all hold our collective breaths. What's going to happen with multiple lightning strikes day after day after day after day in States like California and Nevada and the impact that's going to have?

I think it's clear from the numbers that everybody is talking about is that the status quo isn't quite working.

I guess the first question I have is how much does it cost per acre? I don't know if you have this number per acre to fight a wildfire?

Mr. TIDWELL. It all depends on the fire. There's some where we can quickly get on top of and keep it small to a few acres that the overall costs is relatively small. I'd be glad to be able to provide you a range of costs based—

Senator HELLER. Does it change from State to State, I mean, the cost per one State as opposed to another or is it just to rain and——

Mr. TIDWELL. It's to rain and the number of homes is probably the other thing that really changes the cost. If we're having to first of all protect homes, communities, from fire. That drives the strategy it's going to require a lot more engines.

It's going to justify the use of more equipment. It's just much more difficult verses if we have an opportunity to put in a fire line and then just burn out from it. That's a much more effective. It's less costly.

But there's no question when there's homes involved the costs go up.

Senator HELLER. What about treatment? Is it cheaper to treat per acre? Fire suppression treatment, is it cheaper per acre to do that than it is to actually fight a fire?

Mr. TIDWELL. There's no question we've analyzed over 100 of our hazardous or excuse me, a thousand of our hazardous fuel treatments. In over 90 percent of those treatments have reduced the severity of the fire behavior so that it's easier for us to be able to suppress the fire. It's safer, without any question, for our firefighters.

So we have the data that shows that by making that investment we can reduce the severity so it's easier to stop that fire. We're more successful. What's most important, it's safer for our firefighters to be able to get in there and do their work.

Senator HELLER. I appreciate what the men and women do to fight fires across this country. I've had close—my son, for that matter, has fought fires for the Forest Service and BLM both while he was in college. My brother did, close friends. I think that's typical college work that you join these crews and help fight these fires. I really do appreciate their hard work and effort and what they've done for this country in trying to reduce the damage that's done by these fires.

I saw a report earlier this month that discussed some of the highest risk areas near power lines and critical infrastructure. What are we doing to help relieve some of those problems? What I guess I'm concerned about is rolling blackouts in Nevada and California that's potential from burning lines, critical lines, and perhaps even water, water ways so on and so forth.

So what are we doing as an agency to protect these critical and potentially devastating areas that we could avoid?

The CHAIR. Senator, can I ask? I normally don't do this, but because we have votes that are going to be called and I want to get through. Would you answer that in writing, please?

Senator HELLER. That would be fine.

The CHAIR. Because of time.

Senator HELLER. That would be fine.

The CHAIR. Thank you. We'll make sure we get that question. Excellent question.

Senator HELLER. If I may submit more for the record?

The CHAIR. Yes, absolutely.

Senator HELLER. OK.

The CHAIR. We'll go to Senator Baldwin.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you.

I'm really encouraged that the committee is taking a deliberate look at this critical issue. This is not simply a budgeting issue because fire borrowing really cripples the Forest Service's ability to effectively manage our National Forests. We've talked a little bit about the West and the South. I want to bring a perspective of the Midwest.

In Wisconsin fire borrowing has contributed to lagging timber sales and has a cascading impact across the timber products industry which is a core part of Wisconsin's economy, especially in the Northern part of the State. Wisconsin needs a U.S. Forest Service that has the resources available to do its job and serve our State.

It's why I'm a co-sponsor of the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act because I really feel like we have an opportunity to get this fix enacted in the supplemental funding request. I know that on the House side Representative Simpson has been working hard to make this happen. But I was actually surprised to learn that Representative Paul Ryan, of my own State, is opposing this step forward that would allow our forests to work for our communities once again.

I don't think we should be distracted from the opportunity that we have to get the fix done this year. Communities in Wisconsin and across our country are they've been waiting long enough.

Chief Tidwell, the timber industry is a core part of the economy in Northern Wisconsin. We had a chance to speak more directly about that. We have many small, family owned businesses that are involved in running logging operations and mills.

I know that the Forest Service timber is, in part, a supplier to those mills. That having those functioning mills is essential in a partnership to the Forest Service. It works to accomplish long-term management goals.

So once the fire borrowing impediment is finally solved and I do hope it will be very soon. Can we expect annual timber sales on forests, like the Chequamegon-Nicolet in Northern Wisconsin, will go up? Can I represent to my constituents that that would be the case?

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, part of our FY 2015 budget proposal that reflects the adjustments made by the Wildfire Fund Disaster Act does allow us to request additional money to be able to do more forest restoration, to be able to treat more acres and produce more wood and more jobs. Our target goes up in FY 2015 based on that.

I want to stress that we've been talking about fire. We need to restore our forests to reduce the threat of fire. But we also need to restore our forests to reduce the threat of insect and disease to make sure that they continue to be healthy and provide that mix of benefits.

So that's the other benefit of this. It's not just for our fire prone forests. But there's work that needs to be done, like in your State, to be able to address forest health concerns and then also to provide additional wildlife habitat. It's one of the main reasons we do forest harvest in your State is to provide for wildlife habitat.

So that's just another benefit that would come out from fixing this problem.

Senator BALDWIN. I appreciate that. Given our limited time I may also be submitting some questions for the record including



how you plan on implementing some of the new tools that you've been given in the Farm bill relating to insect and disease and other issues.

One thing I did want to just ask you about, Chief Tidwell, is your budget has several outcome measures but many output measures. While it's useful to see output like board feet sold or miles of stream habitat that's restored, the outcomes of program work is really what the public cares about and how we engage them in support of your programs.

A stated goal of your integrated resource restoration proposal is to create economic opportunities for local communities. Until fiscal year 2013 your budget tracked a measure of jobs related to recreation in the National Forests and Grasslands. I actually think it would be very useful to have a broader outcome that can demonstrate what the Forest Service is doing to advance those local economic opportunities like the many that we have.

I'm wondering if you will work with your staff and my staff and our committee to create an outcome measure that will help Congress and the public understand how successful the Forest Service is at creating and sustaining economic opportunity.

The CHAIR. A yes or no answer would be good right now.

[Laughter.]

Senator BALDWIN. A yes answer would be, right?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

The CHAIR. Yes, that's the one we were hoping. You can give more information because I really want to ask members to 4 minutes each and we'll get everybody in.

Senator FLAKE.

Senator FLAKE. Thank you, Madame Chair.

Thank you for the testimony.

We spoke a little earlier about the White Mountain Stewardship contract, Apache Sitgreaves Forest, that Supervisor Tenney did a good job of explaining the value of that. We do have private industry. I think there's been about \$130 million of investment that's gone into that.

Senator Heinrich and I toured Apache Sitgreaves, as you know, a few months ago and that concern that we have is that that industry that has developed because of the White Mountain Stewardship contracting and too much credit goes to the Forest Service for pushing that forward. But the concern is that it's going to go fallow now because there's a bit of a gap between stewardship contracting, the authority ending and the 4 fly initiative, the second phase, that will involve the Eastern Forest.

That coming on, Senator McCain and I have been very concerned about this for a while. We've written to you looking to see a plan to get some NEPA ready acreage that can be treated otherwise this industry is going to go away. We've not yet seen a plan on how to deal with that, how to bridge that gap.

Can you assure me there is a plan and that Forest Service is working on that? I know you're aware of the problem.

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, we are working on bridging that gap. I'll be glad to share with you the steps we're taking for some additional projects there. Also we're looking at using the BCAP authority out of the Farm bill to be able to help subsidize the costs of

some of the biomass that could be moved to the power plant there that will help that.

But our real problem—and we'll be able to do some things, to get through the immediate year. But our problem is that if we're not able to significantly increase the amount of work that we're doing we're going to keep running into this. That's what we need to really be talking about is how we can find a way to move forward and be able to get more work done.

Our budget request does represent it asked for some additional funding to not only be able to do more hazardous fuels reduction, but more forest restoration work. So it's essential that we're able to find some additional capacity to take advantage of the industry that's now come back into your State and to make sure that it's going to be there 10 years from now.

Senator FLAKE. That's a concern. That we've got it there now, but I can tell you to try to seek investment to go ahead and do this again. It's just not going to be there. We'll lose the gains that we've been able to make.

Talked about the San Juan fire, I think everybody acknowledges that was a lot less severe.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator FLAKE. In the treated areas. So hope we can move ahead.

Just one other issue with regard to the Administration's fire budgeting proposal. Can you tell me how that ensures that the fire borrowing that's taken money out of fuels reduction and treatment will actually go to those areas rather than to some other area like land acquisition or something else?

Is there a guarantee in the President's proposal that the moneys not bled off to suppression will actually go to treatment?

Mr. TIDWELL. You can see in our FY 2015 request where we ask for additional funding to do the work in hazardous fuels and to restore our forests. I think that represents our intent to be able to pursue the additional flexibility in the budget constraint to be able to be more proactive, to reinvest in this work.

I'd be glad to share the numbers with you of the additional request that we've asked for.

Senator FLAKE. Just in the 10 seconds I have left. It is a concern of ours that there's no guarantee that that money will be spent. We all know that sometimes it's prioritized elsewhere. That's why in the amendments that we have, FLAME Act amendments, we ensure that that money goes to treatment.

So, thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

To accommodate everyone Senator Heinrich could go now, then Senator Risch, then Udall and then Cantwell. Is that OK with you, Senator Udall?

Senator Heinrich.

Senator HEINRICH. Thank you, Chair.

First let me start by saying how much I appreciate the work that Senators Wyden and Crapo did on this issue. I think their legislation is probably the most promising, bipartisan solution that I've seen for, well, since we started seeing this, sort of, climate induced

fire cycle that seems to get worse every year in both treated and untreated areas. So I think that's very encouraging.

I want to talk a little bit about the McCain/Barrasso legislation simply because it would mandate certain levels of timber production on our national forests in the name of forest health. First let me say that timber contracts can absolutely be a useful tool for reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires and that applies to some areas in my State as well.

But for the bulk of my State we rely much more heavily on the hazardous fuels reduction program, on stewardship contracting and on watershed restoration programs. That is, in part, because many of the forests that we need to thin in New Mexico are dominated by very small diameter Ponderosa Pine, in particular, but other mixed conifer species as well that are simply not economically viable. Either we don't have proximity access to a market, sometimes for even the large diameter trees or we don't have access to a biofuel facility like the one that I toured in Arizona with Senator Flake near the Apache Sitgreaves.

So we rely very heavily on the collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, Legacy roads and trails, water source protection agreements, like the Santa Fe Water Fund. These have been held back by the uncertainties are created by fire borrowing. My concern with that legislation is that by sending that money solely to timber contracting and defunding these other tools that are working in our forests that we'd have an even worse fire situation in New Mexico's forest.

I think we need to figure out what tools are working, where and use them and not one to the complete exclusion of others.

So, I'd simply ask you, Chief, what would the impact on other forest service programs including watershed restoration programs be of meeting the timber mandates in Senator Barrasso's legislation and Senator McCain's legislation?

Mr. TIDWELL. We do not have an administrative position on Senator Barrasso's bill yet. We haven't had a chance to fully analyze it.

But I will share with you that I have concerns when we limit, maybe prematurely, as to what tool to use. I would prefer for us to be able to look at the landscape and then decide what's the right approach to be able to do that work.

There's no question that we need to do more hazardous fuels reduction.

There's no question.

I've been on the record for years now about the additional work we need to do to restore our forests. So I appreciate the Senator's support to be able to talk about recognizing the need to do more of that work.

But I'm also concerned about where the funding would come from and just now as we see what happens every year when we have to transfer funds. We have to shut down operations. Then each year as the 10-year average keeps increasing every year.

For instance, since FY 2012 to FY 2015 we had to increase fire suppression another \$156 million. Now with a flat budget, that's \$156 million that has to come out of all the other programs which

a lot of them are the ones that you mentioned. So I have those concerns.

I recognize the work that we need to get more work done. Then the other thing, we've made great progress of being able to set up a system where the public feels that they have the opportunity to be fully engaged in the work that's done on their national forests. I'm always concerned if there's anything that limits that participation that I believe it's a step backward. It's something that will probably slow down the progress that we're making.

Where I've testified on Senators Barrasso's Forest bill, the funding bill that McCain and Barrasso has put forward, that's the one that we haven't put an administrative proposal together.

But once again I just want to thank everyone's support for finding a solution to this issue.

The CHAIR. Thank you so much.

Senator Risch, Senator Udall and Senator Cantwell and then we'll close.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Madame Chairman.

Just briefly, I think if you look at the facts there's no question as to why we're in the situation we're in.

When I started in the State senate in 1975 there were over 40 operating sawmills in Southern Idaho. Idaho is cut in half, North/South by the Salmon River. I'd been through a lot of those because I'd been through the forestry school at the University of Idaho. It amazed me that today there are only two of those 40 mills left.

Now you can't stop taking that amount of fuel out of the forest and not cause the problem that we've got.

Now certainly that leads to the problem, but we all know the weather is a huge factor involved in this. Indeed I'm sure both of you look at the Interagency Fire Center report every morning. This is report that comes out of Boise where NFSE is located.

This year, compared to the other years, we're down quite a bit. Over the last 4 years—tomorrow at noon we celebrate in the Intermountain West, halfway through the summer season. We'll be halfway through July.

So looking at the numbers just to this point.

In 2011 at this point we burned 5.8 million acres.

In 2010, 3.5 million acres.

Last year, two million acres.

This year we're down to a million acres.

So we've actually burned half a million acres less this year than we have in the last 10 years. On average we're only about a third because there's about 3 million acres, 3.2 million acres burned every year.

So maybe we're going to be able to catch our breath a little bit this year. We're under a huge high pressure right now that's going to cause us a lot of problems with a lot of heat.

So, I like both McCain/Flake/Barrasso and Wyden/Crapo. I'm a co-sponsor of Wyden/Crapo.

I'm hoping that we can meld those two bills together. They both have some things in it that are good things. They focus on the budgeting nuances that a lot of people in America don't understand, really don't care about. They just want us to get the job done.

I'm hoping we can sit down and reconcile those two so we can get you that bill. You can do what you've committed to do and that is contained to reduce the fuel load because the fuel load together with the weather is what causes the problem. Certainly we're going to have that as time goes forward.

So, with that, thank you, Madame Chairman.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much, Senator Risch.

We've been joined by Senator Wyden. We'll recognize him as well at the appropriate time.

Senator Udall.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Madame Chair.

Chief, it's good to see you. We've discussed a number of cases of the air tanker program. I want to, if you will, thank the Secretary through you for his response to my latest inquiry.

I'm going to keep pushing the Forest Service and the USDA on this issue until I'm confident we've got a fleet that we can be proud of. As you know, air tankers are critical and crucial for the initial attack. They can keep small fires from becoming catastrophic.

I've been watching the next generation air tanker program closely because we can't fight these modern mega fires with Korean War era aircraft. While I'm pleased to hear that your report that up to 9 NextGen tankers are available this fire season I do have a couple follow up questions.

The Secretary's letter indicated that two vendors were on track to meet their start date of June 2014.

First, did that happen?

Second, I'm concerned that so many tanker vendors have not fully delivered or have struggled to meet their contract obligations.

What are your plans to deal with that? What's your plan for getting more of these NextGen aircraft up in the air?

Mr. TIDWELL. We're anticipating by even later today or no later than next week that all of the vendors, except for one, will have their aircraft flying. We do have one vendor that we're going to continue to work with to see if they can provide that plane. But we have the rest of them or actually have provided planes and are using those aircraft.

Senator UDALL. Let me move to the Defense Authorization bill of last year. I serve on the Armed Services Committee. I worked very hard to put in place the potential to transfer up to 7 C-130H aircraft from the Coast Guard to the U.S. Forest Service.

Can you give us an update on the divested aircraft? Do you see any potential road blocks?

Mr. TIDWELL. I'm going to remain concerned about those aircraft until I actually see them flying for us.

But the latest information we have is that we expect to have one of those aircraft probably late next year that we'll put a MAFFS unit into it. Then the following year, two aircraft and then the next year, a few more, so it will be FY 2018 when we actually have all 7 of those that have been fully retrofitted and flying.

So that's the schedule we're working with. Then we're going to continue to work with the Air Force to find if there's any ways that we can accelerate that. But the reality is that those planes have to line up with the Air Force's need to deal with their aircraft and definitely understand their priorities.

Senator UDALL. I'm going to keep pushing to ensure that 2018 fiscal year, is the latest we see those aircraft. I appreciate your frank response.

Madame Chair, in the interest of time why don't I stop here and let other colleagues have a few—

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator Udall. Really appreciate your leadership.

Senator Cantwell.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Madame Chair. Thank you, Chief Tidwell.

This is a map of Washington State. You can see by the yellow and red that almost half of our geographic area is either in high or very high areas. We have several fires now, the Mill Canyons Fire and there is an interagency management team helping. So we greatly appreciate that.

But I think, like so many of my colleagues from Western States, we're we keep seeing this movie over and over again. Yes, we're going to see a certain amount right now the lightning threat does concern us a lot in these areas. But it goes to the basic question of instead of every year stealing basically from other resources, isn't there a—I know the Wyden bill which I support, a management system where we can do some fuel reductions as part of a biomass program and then use those generated dollars to then do the urban interface work that we want to do.

Don't those things go hand in hand?

If you could, since in the interest of time, comment about your potential use or current use of drones in helping us identify the magnitude. It's not been that long ago that we had the 30-mile fire in our State where we lost several lives. Really understanding what's happening and the current threat level is very important and so if you could comment on that.

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, your first question, our stewardship contracting is probably our best approach to be able to look at all the work that needs to be done on the landscape. Then be able to use the value of the biomass, the timber that needs to be removed to be able to offset some of the other restoration work. That's something we're continuing to expand and now close to over about 30 percent of our work is now being done with stewardship contracting.

Then the question on drones, it's one of the things we're looking into to actually use those aircraft to be able to provide better intelligence. Last year on the Rim Fire in California through the State and Department of Defense, we were able to fly a Defense plane that actually helped us pick up some spots that are outside the line earlier than we would have picked it up with our infrared flight.

So there's no question that it's a tool that we need to begin using and we're going to continue to work on that to be able to find the right way to move forward with it so that it can provide better information to our firefighters.

Senator CANTWELL. Do you need anything else from FAA on that to move forward?

Mr. TIDWELL. We're working with the FAA right now. If we need anything else I'll let you know.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you so much. Senator Wyden will have the last word which is appropriate since his bill is how we started this whole discussion.

Senator.

Senator WYDEN. Madame Chair, first of all let me thank you and Senator Murkowski for all of the efforts that you've made with me through this Congress, our O and C legislation, which, of course, is a huge priority, the fire issue. You and Senator Murkowski have just been terrific.

I'm sorry I couldn't be here. We had a major hearing with respect to the transformation of the Medicare program which we've got to do to protect the Medicare guarantee and contain costs or else we're not going to have money for anything else. So I very much appreciate your leadership there.

To have Chief Tidwell, in particular, I think when people write history of forestry, they're going to talk about collaborative forestry. They're going to say, Chief Tidwell was the one who really put the points on the board for that kind of effort.

Chief, I was just in John Day watching them out here lumber. They have a boarding house close by now that has gotten off the ground because they have the certainty and predictability. You gave them the grocery stores selling groceries that economic multiplier that you envisioned for rural areas is in place. So very much appreciate that.

Thank you all also for the help with respect to the firefighting effort.

Madame Chair, I would just only say that I very much want to work with you, with Senator Murkowski. I saw Senator Flake as we were passing through. Senator Crapo and I are very interested in working with all of you in a bipartisan way to pin this down.

I think everyone who looks at the challenge and Senator Murkowski and I talked about it a number of times over the years, knows that the Prevention Fund is getting shorted. When the Prevention Fund gets shorted things tend to go haywire in a hurry because you basically have a forest, a resource that's a magnet for fire. Then you have a lightning strike or something. All of a sudden you have an inferno on your hands.

As colleagues have described apparently in my absence what happens is you've got the inferno. You've got to put it out. You borrow from the Prevention Fund and the problem gets worse.

But I think there's a lot of good will here with the Senators to try to work this out. With your leadership and Madame Chair, with all that you've got on your plate, to have given us all this time and staff time to work on the forestry issues, wildfire and O and C, I couldn't ask for more.

I said, when I had the honor of chairing the Finance Committee, that things would be in very good hands with Chair Landrieu and Senator Murkowski. I'll tell you, I think this issue shows that once again. So I really look forward to working with the two of you and under your leadership.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much, Senator Wyden, for those kind words and encouraging words. We're looking forward to tackling this issue and finding a solution and doing it as quickly as we can.

This is very, very important to the Nation and to many, many members of this committee.

The record will stay open for 2 weeks. There will be additional questions in writing to both of you.

Thank you for your time this morning. But you should expect some additional questions as we try to forge a compromise to solve this problem.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Madame Chairman, just on that and recognizing that you have given all members the courtesy of an additional 2 weeks, I would just ask the Chief and the Department of Interior to try to respond to us as quickly to these QFRs as possible. We do need to get some of these substantive responses to the particulars in order to better craft a solution that is going to work, not only for this year's fire season, but going forward.

I ask for prompt responses to the inquiries from all the members.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:17 p.m. the hearing was adjourned.]



## APPENDIXES

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### APPENDIX I

#### Responses to Additional Questions

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##### RESPONSES OF KIM THORSEN TO QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR MANCHIN

*Question 1.* What do you think about S.2593/does your agency have a position on S.2593?

Answer. The Administration has not taken a position on S. 2593, “The FLAME Act Amendments Act of 2014.”

*Question 2.* What do you think would be the impacts on your agency if S.2593 were enacted into law?

Answer. The Administration has not taken a position on the bill and the analysis of impacts has not been completed.

*Question 3.* What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of S.1875 as compared to relevant sections in S.2593?

Answer. As stated above, the Administration has not taken a position on the bill; however as shared in my testimony, some of the advantages of S.1875 and the President’s budget are:

- Establishment of a new framework for funding fire suppression operations in the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service that will provide stable funding for fire suppression, while minimizing the adverse impacts of fire transfers on the budgets of other fire and non-fire programs. Such a framework allows for a balanced suppression and pro-active fuels management and restoration program, with flexibility to accommodate peak fire seasons but not at the cost of other Interior missions or by adding to the deficit; and
- The cap adjustment does not increase overall discretionary spending, as it would reduce the authority ceiling for the existing disaster relief cap adjustment by the amount required for fire suppression requirements.

Though we always assure adequate funds for firefighting and timely availability, this approach will be more transparent and will prevent the need to disrupt other fire activities and non-fire programs. Under this approach, we will not have to divert funds from important programs to pay for fire costs.

*Question 4.* Do you have any comments on the statement (in S 2593): “... existing budget mechanisms for estimating the costs of wildfire suppression are not keeping pace with the actual costs for wildfire suppression due in part to improper budget estimation methodology.”

Answer. Researchers from USDA Forest Service Research and Development have been providing suppression obligation forecasts for nearly 20 years. Standard regression techniques and accepted statistical methodologies are used. The researchers select variables which include previous research, previous forecasts, and new data series.

The FY 2015 President’s Budget proposes using the FLAME Outyear Forecast to estimate wildland fire suppression funding needs. The methodology used in the FLAME Outyear Forecast is the best projection available. These forecasts are completed using lagged values of data which is a common formulation in economic forecasting and identifies a consistent signal between current and lagged expenditures. Explicit forecasts of drought, climate and weather variables are not available at more than six to nine months ahead, so forecasts are difficult unless lagged values are used.

The ten-year average of suppression obligations is a reasonably good tool for estimating a normal year. However, we are increasingly experiencing years of abnor-

mally high fire activity, which challenge our ability to budget for wildfire suppression costs. The President's Budget seeks to address this challenge by budgeting for wildfire suppression in a manner similar to how the Federal Government budgets for other natural disasters which are also difficult to predict. The President's Budget amends the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act to add an adjustment to the discretionary spending limits for wildfire suppression operations. The cap adjustment is intended to give flexibility to respond to severe, complex, and threatening fire or a severe fire season that is not captured in the historical averages. This new approach for budgeting for wildfire suppression costs will eliminate the need to transfer funds from other fire and non-fire programs and as well as the adverse impact from deferred investment in those programs.

*Question 5.* In your opinion is there a way to improve upon using the 10 year historical fire suppression average as a methodology and, if yes, what might that be? Have you worked on beta-models of statistical regression models that may take the place of the 10 year average? If yes, has this shown any promise to be used—even in combination—with historical rates of expenditures to estimate out-year budget needs for fire suppression?

Answer. Building on the answer provided in question #4, the FY 2015 President's Budget proposes using the FLAME Outyear Forecast to calculate the amount anticipated for wildland fire suppression activities. The outyear forecast is prepared annually by researchers from the USDA Forest Service Research and Development. The researchers believe this methodology is the best projection available. These forecasts are completed using lagged values of data which is a common formulation in economic forecasting and identifies a consistent signal between current and lagged expenditures. Explicit forecasts of drought, climate and weather variables are not available at more than six to nine months ahead, so forecasts are difficult unless lagged values are used. These methodologies are reasonable solutions for these forecasts and use standard modeling accepted for these kinds of forecasts.

The ten-year average is a reasonably good method of estimating suppression cost in an average year, and a stable estimate for budget formulation in outyears until we can incorporate factors such as drought, climate and weather into forecasts. The Administration's proposal, and S. 1875, propose a new budget framework, where a portion of the funding needed for suppression response is funded within the discretionary spending limits, and a portion is funded through the proposed amendment to the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. The proposal is designed to provide stable funding for wildfire suppression, even with uncertainty in the severity and costs of fire seasons, while minimizing the adverse impact of fire transfers on the budgets of other fire and non-fire programs. The cap adjustment will be used for the most severe fire activity which constitutes approximately one percent of all fires and results in 30 percent of the overall costs.

The use of the ten-year average of fire suppression costs for budget formulation, updated with forecast models of cost predictions, and a budget framework that provides certainty of funding while limiting impact to other programs, is a reasonable and responsible approach to addressing the catastrophic and unpredictable nature of wildland fires.

*Question 6.* Under one scenario in S.2593 it may be possible that approximately \$1 billion more would be used for fire suppression costs and forest management activities, as compared to either the administration proposal or S. 1875. Could you please give us an overall idea what the possible effects of this might be?

Answer. The Administration has not taken a position on the bill nor completed an analysis of the bill, however, as provided in my statement, the Administration's proposal and S. 1875 propose a new budget framework, where a portion of the funding needed for suppression response is funded within the discretionary spending limits, and a portion is funded through the proposed amendment to the Balance Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. The proposal is designed to provide stable funding for wildfire suppression, while minimizing the adverse impact of fire transfers on the budgets of other fire and non-fire programs. The cap adjustment will be used for the most severe fire activity which constitutes approximately one percent of all fires and results in 30 percent of the overall costs. In FY 2015 for the DOI, the cap level requested is \$240.4 million.

#### RESPONSES OF KIM THORSEN TO QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR HELLER

News reports earlier this month that discussed that some of the highest risks near power lines and critical infrastructure put some of our Northern Nevada communities and the neighboring communities in California at-risk for rolling black-outs.

*Question 1.* What are your agencies doing to proactively mitigate the risk to critical infrastructure?

Answer. In our allocation decisions, critical infrastructure, including major power lines, has been and will continue to be a key value we use to determine the scope of the fuels problem and aids in determining where priority work should be accomplished. Because critical infrastructure informs allocation decisions, DOI agencies are expected to prioritize these values in their program of work.

*Question 2.* Can the agency mobilize fuel reduction quickly and proactively to treat high-risk areas where a fire could threaten rural communities or critical infrastructure, like power lines or our water delivery infrastructure?

Answer. The fuels program does not have an unlimited capacity to treat the vast amount of expanding wildland-urban interface, critical infrastructure, and other high-risk areas across federal and tribal lands, but fuels program funds are allocated to best protect high valued assets in highest risk areas.

It should also be noted that scientific studies such as one recently published by the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) suggest that focusing fuels treatments on the wildland-urban interface and critical infrastructure alone will not resolve the occurrence of large catastrophic wildfires that threaten these key values. ERI's publication suggests that although hazardous fuels treatments near communities can reduce wildfire risks to home and people, backcountry fuels treatments are equally important to prevent the "mega" wildfires that most often start on federal lands and eventually burn onto state and private lands. The Department recognizes this as an issue and has, therefore, proactively proposed a new approach that complements the existing fuels management program.

The proposed new Resilient Landscapes Program in the 2015 DOI Wildland Fire Management budget is purposed toward making significant short-and long-term investments that result in fire resilient landscapes by focusing funding for Resilient Landscape Collaboratives. These Collaboratives invest and leverage Wildland Fire Management funding with other natural resource funding in order to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildfire by expanding our fire resilient landscapes and better addressing the growing impact of wildfire effects on communities, critical infrastructure and federal lands.

*Question 3.* As you know, the U .S. Fish and Wildlife Agency is under a court order to make a listing determination on the Greater Sage-Grouse under the ESA by Sept. 2015. The responsibility of the health of Nevada's sagebrush ecosystem and rangeland-the critical habitat of the Greater sage-grouse-falls almost entirely on the federal land managers that control over 85% of the land in Nevada. While I understand the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service are in the process of making Resource Management Plan amendments to address threats to habitat, such as wildfire, I fear the further restriction of multiple-use of public lands instead of successfully dealing with wildfire, invasive species, predators, and other threats will not be sufficient to prevent a threatened or endangered listing of the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

How can we spur faster fuel reduction on lands identified as priority habitat for the sage-grouse? Not enough is being done to truly address wildfire threats to habitat and a listing of the sage-grouse will devastate the rural communities in my state.

Answer. We share your concerns about the potential listing of the greater sage grouse. Invasive grasses, encroachment of pinion-juniper, drought, wildfires, and BLM's management decisions are likely to influence the decision by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Department is working with other federal agencies, local and state governments, tribes, partners and stakeholders to take a collaborative approach to reduce wildfire risks in greater sage grouse habitat.

The greater sage grouse is considered a natural resource value we use to determine the scope of the fuels problem and aids in determining where priority work should be accomplished. Because natural resource values inform allocation decisions, DOI agencies are expected to prioritize these values in their program of work. The funding allocated for treatment of these 240,000 acres represents over 61% of the BLM's fuels allocation for this fiscal year.

Funding the Resilient Landscapes program as a new approach to complement the on-going work in the fuels program is essential to the Department's success in protecting critical habitat for the greater sage grouse. The Resilient Landscapes Program is purposed towards making significant short-and long-term investments that result in fire resilient landscapes by focusing funding for Resilient Landscape Collaboratives. These Resilient Landscape Collaboratives are likely to include other federal, state, NGO, and stakeholder partnerships. Resilient Landscape Collaboratives invest and leverage Wildland Fire Management funding with other natural resource funding in order to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wild-

fire. By expanding our fire resilient landscapes and better addressing the growing impact of wildfire effects on communities, we will lessen the risk of wildfire to critical infrastructure and federal lands.

#### RESPONSES OF KIM THORSEN TO QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR FLAKE

*Question 1.* In your testimony, you claim that the administration's wildfire budget proposal would "free up resources to invest in areas that will promote long-term forest health and reduce fire risk." Yet, at least one senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee has indicated that the freeing up these resources will allow the Committee to use those extra resources to fund "the Land and Water Conservation Fund, resource conservation and energy permitting." What guarantees are there in the administration's proposal that the Appropriations Committee would direct the resources that are "freed up" by the proposal to address hazardous fuel reduction?

Answer. The Administration cannot predict the decisions of the Appropriations Committee in its appropriations bill, but the President's Budget does direct much of the "freed up" suppression funding to programs that promote long-term forest health and reduce fire risk. By proposing to fund 70 percent, rather than 100 percent, of the 10-year suppression average within the discretionary budget caps, the President's Budget makes \$115.1 million available for other purposes and invests a good share of this in the broader Wildland Fire Management program. For example, a program increase of \$34.1 million in the Preparedness program would enhance Interior's readiness capabilities by strengthening BIA's wildfire program, funding contract support costs, and providing workforce development opportunities for firefighters, among other things. The President's Budget proposal also includes \$30 million for a new program, Resilient Landscapes, intended to assist in the implementation of the National Cohesive Strategy goals by improving the integrity and resilience of forests and rangeland by restoring and maintaining landscapes to specific conditions for fire resiliency. A \$2.0 million increase requested for the Burned Area Rehabilitation program would be invested in areas where recovery of fire-damaged lands is required. This includes areas where wildfire has impacted critical habitat throughout the western states such as the greater sage grouse habitat in the Great Basin.

*Question 2.* In your testimony, you state, "This base level funding ensures that the cap adjustment will only be used for the most severe fire activity which constitutes approximately one percent of all fires and 30 percent of the costs." Is it your understanding that this 30 percent cap adjustment would continue to apply, even if the administration's proposal allows it to reduce fire suppression costs through proactive hazardous fuels reduction work?

Answer. Yes, the cap adjustment based on the FLAME Outyear Forecast would continue as outlined in the amendment to the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. Use of the funds over time may not be required as proactive fuels management work is completed. However, the beneficial effect of this type of work is longer term and it would be premature to assume short term results or corresponding financial savings.

*Question 3.* Will the Department commit to working with Senators McCain, Barrasso, and myself on resolving this devastating fire borrowing problem, more accurately funding wildfire suppression, and committing resources to proactive forest restoration?

Answer. The Department is committed to working with the Congress to collaboratively address the issues associated with a resolution to adequately fund the high priority programs of wildland fire suppression and fuels management.

*Question 4.* Will the Secretary of the Interior commit to appearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to discuss the Department's FY15 budget request before the beginning of the next fiscal year?

Answer. The Secretary and the Department are committed to working with the Committee to discuss all appropriate issues.

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#### RESPONSES OF KEN PIMLOTT TO QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR MANCHIN

*Question 1.* What do think it may take to really get a handle on the massive issues facing forests across your State? You highlight the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and S. 1875 (Wyden-Crapo) as two important things. Do you have any other recommendations?

Answer. The situation facing forested lands in California is growing increasingly dire. The current drought is exacerbating conditions in forested landscapes already stressed by disease and insects, encroached upon by development, and suffering

from declining active forest management over time. Fire seasons across the West are lasting over 70 days longer than they did just 30 to 40 years ago and in California, there has been a drastic increase in the occurrence of large, damaging fires with over half of the state's largest fires in recorded history occurring just since 2002.

In recognition of the need to improve the health of the forested lands in the State, there have been a number of programmatic developments, as well as funding increases at the State level. In this most recent year, there is over \$40 million of investments in improving the health of the State's forests from the proceeds of the California cap-and-trade auctions. This funding is for a range of programs including assistance for land owners with fuel reduction and other forest health activities. This is in addition to the over \$25 million for fire prevention that will be invested in 2014-15. The State's 2010 strategic fire plan guides all of the State's activities in these areas, and the State is now playing a more active role in local land use planning.

However, no one entity can address this problem alone. A stable funding source as would be achieved through S. 1875 is critical to not only appropriately funding the fire suppression efforts but also to ensuring that the other critical forest health programs are supported. Once these efforts are fully funded, it will be possible for the State to further partner with the Federal land management agencies on projects and facilities that support all of our land management objectives. For example, the State could provide support for small, disbursed biomass facilities that could process fuel treatment residue from both State and Federal projects.

Longer term, I would urge the Federal agencies to engage in more active forest management as is appropriate to the agency's mission. This could be through the removal of dead or dying trees, active replanting after large-scale fires, or through harvesting of timber to encourage forest health.

*Question 2.* Do you have an opinion on the possible prioritization of fire-fighting and forest fuels reduction activities, possibly at the expense of other programs that the Forest Service and DOI agencies undertake?

Answer. CAL FIRE is the agency that is responsible for not only providing fire suppression and prevention on 31 million acres of the State, but also for regulating timber operations in the State. As both a fire chief, and the State Forester, I am keenly aware of the tradeoffs that must be made in fiscally challenging times. Each agency must make fiscal decisions based upon their priorities and the priorities of their stakeholders, and as such, I would not want to speak to the prioritization within other agencies' budgets.

However, at a high level, and based upon my experience in California, I know that many of the programs in land management agencies contribute to the overall health of the landscape. Even in the toughest of fiscal situations that the State has faced, I worked to protect to the extent possible these other programs in my Department.

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#### RESPONSES OF DAVID PORTER TENNEY TO QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR MANCHIN

*Question 1.* Do you have an opinion on the possible prioritization of fire-fighting and forest fuels reduction activities, possibly at the expense of other programs that the Forest Service and DOI agencies undertake?

Answer. There are 3 parts to this answer:

I. From a practical perspective, there is little choice but to give fire suppression activities top priority. Catastrophic landscape scale fires can, and often do, create life threatening situations, and routinely cause private and public property damages costing hundreds of \$ million. Further, in addition to destroying the vegetation, uncharacteristically hot crown fires often damage or destroy the soils. As a consequence, in the dry climates of the Southwest, forestry re-vegetative cycles can literally extend into centuries as new soil must be formed over decades or centuries before mature forests can regrow over additional decades or centuries. Alternatively, the combination of fire destructions and long term droughts may altogether cause a permanent shift away from forested ecosystems toward ecologically less productive chaparral or shrublands. The current destruction of the forests of the inner West by catastrophic fires has the potential to be literally life-changing for the culture, economy and customs of the West and the nation. However, because catastrophic landscape scale fires are not natural events from an ecological perspective, fire suppression should be funded using a process similar to the funding required during and after other national disasters such as earthquakes or hurricanes. The current process of "fire borrowing" wreaks havoc on the Forest Service budgeting and prioritization processes. Not only is it unsustainable, but it is unpredictable

from the budgetary and operational perspectives. The use of a reliable predictive forecast tool such as the FLAME regression model appears highly advisable.

II. As soon as fire suppression costs can be funded for what they are: emergency national responses to national catastrophic events, fuel reduction activities must become the absolute budgetary and operational priorities of the Forest Service for at least the next few decades. Stewardship of the resource implies the continuation in existence of the resource. While cool ground fires are a natural process that must be reintroduced to the benefit of the national forests, the conditions created by decades of misguided indistinct fire prevention policies that have resulted in unacceptable catastrophic fire risks through the accumulation of fuel, must be addressed. A clear and present danger exists that must be urgently contained. This priority takes precedence, temporarily at least, over other multiple-use foci. Precious little multiple uses can be enjoyed or benefited from, for decades, after catastrophic landscape scale crown fires destroy ecosystems, biodiversity, watersheds and natural resources. While this focus on funding fuel reduction activities cannot be exclusive, it certainly must be highly prioritized and disproportionately funded accordingly. Considering the high return on dollars invested in forest restoration in terms of dollars not subsequently expended on fire suppression, it appears advisable to invest urgently and substantially in preventive fuel reduction activities at a rate of \$1 in prevention treatments for every \$2 expended in fire suppression for the next two decades, and possibly longer, until the forests of the West are returned to their original natural fire resistant structure, and landscape scale catastrophic fires are the exception rather than the norm.

III. While the debate over which programs to defund in order to fund fuel reduction activities is certain to raise deep societal questions, it seems that the Forest Service, DOA and DOI could benefit from adopting best practices from the market economy. Specifically, it is a rare occurrence indeed for the Forest Service to terminate an unsuccessful project. This may result from a statistically uncommonly high success rate for the Forest Service projects (?), or possibly from a reluctance to recognize failure and act accordingly. This violates one of the most fundamental principles of successful private enterprise, which is to "feed success and starve failure." Simply put, projects within all programs that do not deliver on measurable commitments made when funding was / is applied for and granted, must be re-evaluated and, if appropriate, defunded. This concept applies to all projects for all programs, including often high profile collaborative projects heralded as successes but scarce on actual measurable delivery. Unsuccessful projects' funding can then be redirected toward successful projects that deliver based on objective measured criteria. For example, when evaluating forest restoration, the baseline criteria to define success may not be acres "analyzed," "planned," or "awarded," etc. but quite prosaically: acres actually "treated."

Reducing waste and inefficiencies may actually go a long way toward funding effective fuel reduction activities, while avoiding difficult, and possibly unnecessary, societal choices at programs level.

*Question 2.* The White Mountain Stewardship contract, as I understand it, has used a Multi-Party Monitoring Board. It includes a diverse group of stakeholders. What is your take on how well this has worked? What lessons can be learned and how might they be applied to similar types of efforts on other national forests?

*Answer.* Navajo County has been deeply involved in the White Mountain Stewardship contract Multi-Party Monitoring Board over the last decade. Simply stated, the Multi-Party Monitoring Board may prove itself to be one of the most effective and efficient accountability mechanisms pioneered by the White Mountain Stewardship contract. This statement must, however, be qualified by the observation that the successive Supervisors of the Apache / Sitgreaves National Forest (Elaine Zieroth, Chris Knopp, Jim Zornes) have not only accepted but embraced the concepts of meaningful collaboration and public accountability. This may not reflect a universal trend among the line officers of the Forest Service.

Lessons learned from the White Mountain Stewardship contract Multi-Party Monitoring Board include the observation that such mechanism benefits both the Forest Service and the community, and the recommendations that the mechanism must be not only widely implemented but actually reinforced.

Without compromising the sole decision-making authority of the agency, one can envision the institutionalization of the Multi-Party Monitoring Boards influence in the content of the Forest Service decisions, in lieu of the reliance on the willingness of the line officers to allow, or not, such influence.

Honoring the product of the collaborative work is a fundamental driver of effective long-term collaboration. Such honoring is currently left to the appreciation of individual line officers' perspectives. It needs to be codified.

Meaningful monitoring is a fundamental part of adaptive management, and collaborative work is a prerequisite to social license for the implementation of large scale projects. Integrating the collaborative products, such as objectively appropriate recommendations of Multi-Party Monitoring Boards must become the regulated rule rather than the exception.

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[Responses to the following questions were not received at the time the hearing was sent to press:]

QUESTION FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR LANDRIEU

*Question 1.* Chief Tidwell, as the charts here demonstrate, and you mention in your testimony, today over 40 percent of your budget is devoted to wildland fire management. This is a dramatic increase from 13 percent of your budget in 1991. Can you walk us through how the fire budgeting situation constrains your abilities to tend to all the many other parts of your multiple use mission? For example, in the past five years, what resources have you had to move from other areas of your mission to accommodate the increase in wildfire management?

As a follow-up, can you describe to us the impact on the mission of your Agency should the Forest Service and DOI be legislatively directed to provide up to an additional \$1 billion in fire management funding from within you existing budgets?

QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR JOHNSON

*Question 1.* The 2014 Farm Bill contains several provisions designed to improve the ability of the Forest Service and private forest land owners to respond to changing conditions and streamline treatment and restoration. These include the Good Neighbor authority, designated insect and disease treatment areas that was piloted in the Black Hills, and the permanent reauthorization of stewardship contracting. Several of these tools have not yet been implemented on a broad scale, so their full effect cannot be completely known. However, the Forest Service has now had several months to plan for their use. Recognizing this, please respond to the following questions:

- What are the Forest Service's plans for utilizing these tools?
- In what ways will they be leveraged to address forest health issues and limit the potential for destructive wildfire?
- How does the Forest Service anticipate that the tools can be used improve the timing and flow of forest products to users of those products?
- When are the tools likely to be made fully available to local forest managers?
- How will the availability of the tools influence the annual goals established for treatment and harvest?

QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR STABENOW

*Funding Impacts*

The Great Lakes States are home to a number of National Forests that support tourism and recreation. While States like Michigan do not suffer from catastrophic fires, the Forest Service's reliance on fire borrowing often reduces the available funds to complete basic restoration and forest health maintenance work necessary to keeping these forests healthy.

*Question 1.* How much money has been diverted from Region 9 to go towards fire suppression in the last ten years? How much of that money would have gone to the Hiawatha, Huron-Manistee, and Ottawa National Forests?

How much money gets diverted from programs that would have benefited Great Lakes States?

Do you anticipate transferring funds again from Region 9 this year?

*Timber and Forest Products*

Timber and forest products are a large component of the local economy and livelihood in Michigan, especially in Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. As such, it is vital that the Forest Service is being as efficient as possible when it comes to programs and funds that go towards the treating, marking, and selling of timber.

*Question 2.* What impact does fire borrowing have on the timber and forest products industry across the Nation? What would the increase be in timber, logging, and forest products, if fire borrowing was not occurring in Region 9?

#### *Farm Bill*

The 2014 Farm Bill expands a number of authorities in the Forestry Title such as creating permanent Stewardship Contracting, Nation-wide Good Neighbor Authority, and modified Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRA). These changes should allow the Forest Service to more efficiently and effectively target restoration; mitigation and suppression work in the National Forest System. However, without significant reform to the Forest Service's wildfire budget the effectiveness of these programs will be offset by reduced projects and activities as funds and man power get diverted to fire suppression needs.

*Question 3.* Can you describe how a lack of action to reform fire suppression budgets could impact the great work we achieved in the 2014 Farm Bill?

#### *Fire Prevention*

Current and forecasted climatic conditions and demographic trends indicate that wildfire challenges will continue to increase in the coming years. Changes in climate are exacerbating the wildland fire problem as our forests become dryer and subject to longer and more frequent fire seasons.

*Question 4.* What types of forest restoration and forest health work needs to be completed to reduce the conditions that lead to catastrophic wildfires?

How does fire borrowing keep you from being able to complete these types of activities?

#### *Restoration*

We have seen a lot of success in Western states utilizing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CLFR) to address restoration projects that leverage local resources with national and private resources. However, we have not seen this type of success replicated in the Great Lakes states.

*Question 5.* Does the Forest Service plan on expanding CLFR criteria to make the Great Lakes States more competitive in this application process?

#### *Integrated Resource Restoration*

Currently Region 9 is not part of the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) program. IRR offers the Forest Service the flexibility to prioritize and implement restoration projects with an increased efficiency and effectiveness by allowing multiple activities to be scheduled in a single field season. I understand that the President's FY2015 budget seeks to expand this program to all Forest Service regions.

*Question 6.* Can you address the lessons the Forest Service has learned from the pilot programs in Regions 1, 3, and 4? How do you foresee the IRR program aiding Michigan and the Great Lakes if it was extended to include Region 9?

#### QUESTION FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR UDALL

*Question 1.* We have communicated many times about the need to accelerate the pace of restoration of our national forests and the role that a diverse forest products industry can play. My state is home to a diverse timber industry that includes small specialty mills in places like Kremmling, Mancos, and Saguache, a cutting-edge five-megawatt biomass energy facility in Gypsum, and a traditional sawmill in Montrose. Your proposed budget calls for a 19 percent increase in timber sales. Can you please report on how this increase can be applied to support forest management and jobs in my state in FY 15, and whether the U.S. Forest Service will scale it in a manner that can help all of those diverse small businesses in my state?

#### QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR MANCHIN

#### *FY 2015 Budget*

*Question 1.* What do you consider to be the top three challenges that came out of your FY 15 budget planning process? In your FY 15 budget request you say that "the sheer scale of the challenges is daunting." One example, from your testimony, is that the Forest Service manages 58 million acres with a high, or very high, potential for a large wildfire which would be difficult for suppression resources to contain.

- a. How would you propose to mitigate any or all of the wildfire risks on these acres, especially in a budget constrained environment?
- b. How much would it cost to simply treat the 58 million acres?
- c. How do you prioritize those acres to treat?
- d. How do you see this playing out in West Virginia?



*Question 2.* What do you consider to be the top three opportunities that came out of your FY 15 budget planning process?

- a. How would you propose to capitalize on them?
- b. How do you see this playing out in West Virginia?

*Restoring resilient landscapes:*

*Question 3.* Restoring resilient landscapes is one of three focal areas you mention in your FY 15 budget request, along with building thriving communities, and managing wildland fires. Nearly all of the Monongahela has been designated as a forest in declining health; the Forest Service has designated 45 million acres of the National Forest System in response to requests from governors whose states are experiencing, or are at risk of, an insect or disease epidemic:

- a. Can you explain in layman's terms what restoring resilient landscapes is?
- b. How might you recommend restoring these landscapes?
- c. The Farm Bill repealed the pre-decisional appeals process and the use of categorical exclusions in certain circumstances. What more might be done to help ensure that the agency can tackle such a vast forest health issue? Would you support greater use of categorical exclusions or any other mechanisms that may help expedite the timeliness of crucial on-the-ground forest restoration activities?
- d. Please provide specific forest restoration activities that have been done or are planned on the Monongahela National Forest.

*Invasive species, insect and disease threats*

*Question 4.* Invasive species are a big issue in West Virginia and across the nation. Please describe what specifically the Forest Service is proposing to do in the FY15 budget request to help alleviate what is seemingly a worse problem every year? What more can be done?

*Question 5.* Insect and disease threats. I would like to hear about the implementation of actions to address insect and disease threats and help restore healthy forests under Section 602 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 as added by section 8204 of the Agriculture Act of 2014. I also would like to understand how implementation may proceed in relation to Section 8006, which relates to Forest Service decision making and the appeals process. As you know, excluding wilderness areas, the entire Monongahela National Forest has been designated as a landscape-scale insect and disease area. This will allow the Forest Service to evaluate and potentially treat the forest for insects and diseases. As you also know, the Monongahela has quite a bit of timber that could be harvested in accordance with the allowable sale quantity (ASQ). The trend, though, beginning in the mid-1990's has been to harvest significantly below than what your models show could be cut, somewhere in the neighborhood of 20% of the ASQ. A greater harvest level, through restoration activities, would then help make the forest healthier and be good for jobs in West Virginia.

- a. What is your plan for implementation of the lands designated under section 602 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act on the Monongahela?
- b. How might this intersect with the FY 2015 budget request?
- c. What are the agencies' plans for implementation of these measures across all lands managed by the Forest Service?
- d. What do you see as impediments to beginning able to begin addressing the sizable insect and disease issues on the Monongahela?

*Biomass*

*Question 6.* Biomass from our forests, especially low value wood, deserves more attention. I know your research branch has been working on this for many years but, as far as I know, little biomass is utilized off national forest land. Using biomass could help reduce the incidence of fires and help restore forests.

- a. What specifically does the Forest Service have in its FY15 budget request for biomass research and utilization and what more can you do?
- b. How might you make use of biomass off the Monongahela National Forest in my state?

*Climate Change*

*Question 7.* Climate change is an issue I know the Forest Service has been involved with for a number of years, particularly in the area of research. One topic, in relation to forest management, relates to whether old growth forests or younger stands of trees sequester greater amounts of carbon.

- a. What does the science show?
- b. How might National Forest System lands be able to sequester more carbon?
- c. What is proposed in the FY15 budget towards the mitigation of climate change?

### *Partnerships*

*Question 8.* I know of, and applaud, the many partnerships the Monongahela has with public and private organizations. I also read in your budget request the “need to strengthen service through cooperation, collaboration, and public-private partnerships”. I am totally supportive of this. At the same time partners will sometimes say that working with the Forest Service can be challenging both from the amount of process that might be involved and that staff on forests and districts may not have the time to forge and maintain partnerships.

a. What might you be proposing in your FY15 budget request that will improve how the agency actively works with partner organizations?

b. How might the agency be able to make even better use of partnerships and collaboration to achieve crucial on-the-ground work? What added policy tools might be of assistance?

c. What partnership efforts do your research and state and private branches have in West Virginia and how might they be improved?

### *Cooperative Fire*

*Question 9.* Chief Tidwell, as you know I joined many of my colleagues in the Senate in a letter to Secretary Hagel last week seeking clarification around the status of excess property transfers under the Firefighter Property Program and the Federal Excess Property Program, which were recently stopped by the Department of Defense citing EPA regulations. We now understand that the Defense Logistics Agency and the EPA have reached an agreement to restart transfers by confirming that the National Security Exemption would continue to apply to certain vehicles without emissions certificates, but this agreement appears to include a new requirement that DOD retain title to all property covered by the National Security Exemption. How will this agreement impact the two programs and the ability of local fire departments to obtain equipment they need to do their jobs?

a. For FFP, how will preventing local fire departments from obtaining title to covered equipment impact the workload of tracking equipment at the Forest Service and for the states?

b. I understand the Forest Service gains access to excess equipment under FEPP through the General Services Administration, or “GSA,” do you know if GSA is going to be able to offer equipment covered by the NSE to the Forest Service for the FEPP program?

### *Wildfire Disaster Funding*

*Question 10.* As you know I have cosponsored the Wyden-Crapo Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. It is important legislation.

a. What confidence do you have that, if enacted, we will finally get beyond the need for transfers of funds from other agency accounts and the periodic requests for emergency supplemental funding?

b. How long do you think it is going to take for the costs of fighting fires to level off and even drop?

*Question 11.* What can the agency do, perhaps differently than has been done previously, to really make a significant dent in this issue?

*Question 12.* What do you think about S.2593/does your agency have a position on S.2593?

*Question 13.* What do you think would be the impacts on your agency if S.2593 were enacted into law?

*Question 14.* What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of S.1875 as compared to relevant sections in S.2593?

*Question 15.* Do you have any comments on the statement (in S 2593):

. . . existing budget mechanisms for estimating the costs of wildfire suppression are not keeping pace with the actual costs for wildfire suppression due in part to improper budget estimation methodology.

*Question 16.* In your opinion is there a way to improve upon using the 10 year historical fire suppression average as a methodology and, if yes, what might that be? Have you worked on beta-models of statistical regression models that may take the place of the 10 year average? If yes, has this shown any promise to be used even in combination with historical rates of expenditures to estimate out-year budget needs for fire suppression?

*Question 17.* Under one scenario in S.2593 it may be possible that approximately \$1 billion more would be used for fire suppression costs and forest management activities, as compared to either the administration proposal or S. 1875. Could you please give us an overall idea what the possible effects of this might be?

## QUESTION FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR HEINRICH

*Question 1.* In your testimony you mention the one Very Large Airtanker available to the Forest Service to fight wildland fires on a Call When Needed Contract. Very Large Airtankers deliver four times more retardant per load than other tankers. What is your assessment of the relative advantages and value of using very large airtankers, such as a DC-10, to fight wildland fires? Is the Forest Service considering expanding the future use of very large airtankers?

## QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR BALDWIN

Your budget has several outcome measures and many output measures. While it can be useful to see outputs like board feet sold, or miles of stream habitat restored, the outcomes of program work is really what the public cares about. A stated goal of your Integrated Resource Restoration proposal is to create economic opportunities for local communities.

Until FY 2013 your budget tracked a measure of jobs related to recreation on National Forests and Grasslands. I think that it would be very useful to a broader outcome that can demonstrate what the Forest Service is doing to advance those local economic opportunities.

*Question 1.* Will you work with your staff to create an outcome measure that will help Congress and the public understand how successful the Forest Service is at creating and sustaining economic opportunities? How long will the process of creating that outcome measure take, and will we see it in the FY 2016 Budget Request?

*Question 2.* How will you implement new authorities from the Farm Bill and the FY 2014 Appropriations bill such as the insect and disease designations, the good neighbor authority, and the now-permanent stewardship contracting authority to increase the sale of timber on forests like the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest that did not previously have these authorities available?

When will forest product management authorities like the good neighbor authority and stewardship contracting start to be used in Wisconsin on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest?

*Question 3.* In addition to proposing a legislative fix to fire borrowing for catastrophic wildfires, your budget proposes significant increases for forest management and restoration funding, over a \$60 million increase from the FY 2014 request. What outcomes can we expect from the Forest Service if that request is fully funded?

What timber sales output and what levels of restoration can we expect to see on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in FY 2015 if Integrated Resource Restoration is approved and funded at \$820 million or if a pro-rated increase in funding were provided under the traditional timber management budget line item?

*Question 4.* Wisconsin has a strong tradition of hunting, fishing and enjoying the great outdoors. Outdoor recreation is an important economic driver in Wisconsin, supporting 142,300 jobs and contributing more than \$11.9 billion annually to the state's economy. The 1.5 million acre Chequamegon-Nicolet National forest exists within a forest boundary that is defined by a patchwork of ownership consisting of national forest lands as well as about 500,000 acres of industrial forest land, managed private lands, as well as State and county lands.

You are requesting \$2 million specifically for recreational access to Forest Service lands in the budget request in FY 2015, a decrease of \$500,000 from the FY 2014 request.

Why did you decrease your request for this important program that increases recreational access for the public?

## QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR MURKOWSKI

*Anan Creek*

In April 2013, at the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing to examine the Forest Service Budget for FY 2014, I asked you about a popular wildlife viewing area located 30 miles southeast of Wrangell, Alaska called Anan Creek. Anan Creek supports one of the largest pink salmon runs in Southeast Alaska making it popular with both brown and black bear. This site could be a tremendous tourism opportunity for Southeast Alaska but there is a problem—there is nowhere for boaters to tie up. The Forest Service has acknowledged that this is a safety hazard that leads to damaged boats and planes and has identified a need for a float dock. In August 2013, you visited the site with me and saw first-hand the access challenges that could be remedied by a float dock. It is unacceptable that the Forest Service has allowed this safety hazard to continue at a premier bear viewing site. You, yourself, told me, and I quote:

It's an area that I want to work with you. I know the region will want to work to be able to find a way to put a dock in there. There are systems in place now that you can retract a dock and then put it back out. [ . . . I'll contact the region to see what we could do to maybe, be able to move forward with, you know putting a dock there.] (See transcript for S. HRG 113-26 p. 29-30).

Although the Forest Service still acknowledges the fact that a float dock is needed at Anan Creek to mitigate the safety hazard, the Forest Service recently informed my staff recently that it does not currently have plans to install one. My staff was also told that the Tongass National Forest was taking an interim step by installing a float from another project at Anan Creek, but on a recent visit to the site I did not see a float dock.

*Question 1a.* What is the status of this interim float dock? What project is this float being removed from and installed at Anan Creek?

*Question 1b.* Chief, did you follow up as you said you would with the Alaska Region to ensure that a dock was installed at the site? When is the Forest Service going to install a float dock? Please provide a timeline and the plan for installation.

#### *Recreation Budget*

I am receiving many complaints from constituents that the Forest Service seems to be cutting funding for recreation programs at a higher rate in Alaska than on the national forest system nationwide. In 2014, your budget office informed my staff that the budgets for trails fell 13 percent annually in Alaska between 2009 and 2014, compared to a 7 percent annual drop nationwide, and that your budget for recreation funding generally fell 23 percent in Alaska over the same period compared to a 6 percent drop nationwide. Yet, at every turn, the Forest Service is telling our communities to diversify and look more to recreation-based tourism to fuel their economies.

*Question 2a.* If those numbers are accurate, why is Alaska taking such a big hit compared to what is happening nationwide?

*Question 2b.* It is my understanding that the Forest Service in Alaska is conducting public meetings to solicit input on the budgets for the state's national forests. Constituents have contacted my office to inform me that in these meetings, Forest Service employees are stating that the recreation and wilderness budgets in Alaska are likely to fall by another 50 percent over the next five years. Is that drop attributable to estimates based on the 2011 sequestration process, or is the Forest Service shifting funding out of the Alaska Region to other regions nationwide? If so, why?

*Question 2c.* My office is also receiving reports that permits for air taxi operators into lakes in and around Misty Fjords and bear viewing at Anan Creek are being cut by the Tongass National Forest. The reason reportedly being given by the Forest Service to these permit holders for these cuts is that funding and personnel to administer the permits have had to be shifted from recreation to the timber programs. Is this true? Is it the position of the Forest Service that these two programs- recreation and timber- must be an either/or proposition on the Tongass? Please explain, in detail, how these two programs are funded, staffed and managed on the Tongass.

#### *Under Thunder Pathway Project*

On November 25, 2013, I received a letter from your Forest Service in response to my request regarding the Under Thunder Pathway Project in Juneau, Alaska. In your letter, you indicated that the Forest Service was working to find an expedient and appropriate solution, and that two options were under review.

*Question 3a.* Have either of those options been selected by the Forest Service?

*Question 3b.* What is the status of the Under Thunder Pathway Project?

*Question 3c.* Has the trail construction been completed on USFS land?

#### *Roadless Rule*

Earlier this year, the Ninth Circuit Court upheld the rulemaking by which the USDA promulgated the 2003 Tongass Exemption. We are still waiting for a final resolution of the legal process, but I am hopeful that soon the exemption will be restored. Regardless, you have indicated on multiple occasions including publically during our August 2013 trip in Southeast Alaska that there is flexibility in the application of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule that can be exercised now to manage inventoried roadless. I am still waiting to see this flexibility outlined and exercised in Alaska. The inventoried roadless areas total approximately 9.6 million acres of the Tongass. Currently, there are more than 30 hydroelectric projects alone affected by the Rule.

*Question 4a.* Please outline what the Forest Service's plans are for timber sales, hydroelectric projects, transmission lines, and mining roads in inventoried roadless?

*Question 4b.* Please describe, in detail, the flexibilities you see within the Roadless Rule and the Forest Service plans to exercise these flexibilities in the management of inventoried roadless in Alaska.

#### *Timber Budget*

In 2005, the Forest Service offered 110 million board feet of timber for sale in the Tongass, 65 mmbf actually being sold/cut. Last year while sales were reduced due to lawsuits, you offered only 15.9 million board feet and thanks to previous years' surplus, 36.4 million board feet were actually sold/harvested. Since the reimposition of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule in Alaska in 2009, it is my understanding that very little new road building costs are being incurred in timber sales on the Tongass.

*Question 5a.* What was the actual budget for Forest Service operations in the Tongass in 2005, compared to 2013 and how much of that total budget was devoted to timber sales versus other Forest Service activities in the Tongass? (Please provide this information in actual dollars and as a percentage of the total budget)

*Question 5b.* Based on data supplied by the Forest Service, the Alaska Region has 107 actual employees in the Regional Office, 358 employees dealing with the Tongass and 127 working in the Chugach Forest. How many of these employees were devoted to timber harvesting and how many to recreation, wilderness protection, maintenance of forest trails and facilities, and other administrative functions and how do those numbers compare to the historical norm in Alaska?

#### *Timber Planning*

Under the Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990, the Forest Service is required to "seek to meet" market demand for timber from the Tongass on an annual basis. Your office this spring indicated that the Forest Service believes there is a demand for the sale of at least 142 million board feet from the Tongass in fiscal year 2014 with a similar amount needed for future years, while an unofficial summary of your timber sale plans appear to indicate you are planning to offer only about 113 million board feet for sale over the next two years, with lesser amounts thereafter.

*Question 6a.* Exactly how many timber sale planning and layout teams are at work in Alaska today and how many do you anticipate needing for the next five years? How many are focusing on traditional old-growth sales and how many are focusing on new young-growth transition sales?

*Question 6b.* Aren't you required by the 1990 Act to plan for sales of economically viable timber that will satisfy your estimate of market demand for Alaska timber?

*Question 6c.* If you need additional funding to be able to prepare sales to meet such demand, don't you have a legal obligation to seek sufficient funding from Congress to meet the requirements of the 1990 act?

#### *Tongass Transition*

The Secretary of Agriculture last July signed a memorandum proposing to transition timber harvesting in the Tongass National Forest away from old-growth trees and instead focusing largely on second- or young-growth timber within 10 to 15 years. The memorandum also stated that transition assistance would be made available to existing industry in order to help accomplish it.

*Question 1.* How much aid and what type of aid, does the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service intend to provide the industry in Southeast to help it make the transition to young-growth timber economically viable? When will that assistance be made available?

*Question 2.* How much are you planning to spend to lay out and offer timber sales of old-growth timber over the next five years and how much are you planning to spend to lay out and offer timber sales of young-growth timber over the same period?

*Question 3.* Since you are required by law to offer only sales that are profitable-non-deficit-how do you intend to make young-growth sales profitable to operators?

#### *Fuel Treatments*

At the hearing, it was clear that the Forest Service in particular, has a serious and extensive over-accumulation of vegetation problem on its public forests that is fueling these large, intense and catastrophically destructive wildfires that are occurring across the West. An estimated 190 million acres of all federal forest and rangelands are at an increased risk of catastrophic wildfire. Areas that are called moderate to high risk are prone to large intense fires that overwhelm suppression ef-

forts and eat up the wildfire suppression budget. The Forest Service has been clear that there is something we can do about it. I quote:

Unlike other natural disasters such as earthquakes or hurricanes, where the intensity of the natural event cannot be influenced, the intensity of wildland/wildland-urban interface fires can be reduced through responsible fuel management. Fuel treatments can change fire behavior, decrease fire size and intensity, divert fire away from high value resources, and can result in reduced suppression costs. (Forest Service written testimony on FY 2015 Budget)

Fuel Treatments include (1) biological methods such as prescribed fire; (2) chemical use (herbicides); (3) mechanical thinning (using saw, tractors and other logging equipment to cut up and remove woody materials); (4) a combination of these methods. In high risk areas, though, some fuels must be removed mechanically to reduce fuel loading before it is possible to use prescribed fire.

Doing fuel treatment work appears to be the one thing we can do to get a handle on the fire problem. With that in mind, it is my understanding that the Forest Service reports on the number of acres treated per year on the National Forest System, but it is unclear from the number what you are counting in terms of treatment method or whether these treatments are being done on actual acres that are at risk of wildfire.

*Question 8a.* How many acres of National Forest System lands did the Forest Service treat in fiscal year 2013? Please break down that number according to the following:

- Acres mechanically treated.
- Acres mechanically treated using commercial timber harvest.
- Acres treated with prescribed fire (please describe specifically the number of acres treated with prescribed fire that were wildfires burning within prescription, fires being allowed to burn to achieve resource objectives, or acres burned in back fires as part of suppression efforts).
- Acres treated using other tools besides prescribed fire and mechanical thinning. (describe the tools).

*Question 8b.* Please provide a table that shows by national forest the number of acres treated using each of the treatment methods described above for fiscal year 2013.

#### *Wildfire Cap Adjustment*

*Question 9a.* If budgeting and requesting 100 percent of the 10-year average isn't working and your suppression costs are exceeding those levels, why hasn't the Forest Service used a different method or forecast model to determine the budget request for suppression that might be more accurate?

*Question 9b.* If a FLAME Act regression model were used to calculate your budget request for suppression, how much would you expect to have to budget? How does that compare with the 10-year average? What effect, if any, would this have on the rest of the Forest Service's discretionary budget?

*Question 9c.* If a 5-year average were used to calculate your budget request for suppression, how much would you have to budget? How does that compare with the 10-year average? What effect, if any, would this have on the rest of the Forest Service's discretionary budget?

*Question 9d.* Instead of requesting 100 percent of the 10-year rolling average, your budget proposal requests just 70 percent of it. This departs from the longstanding practice of the agency requesting the 10-year average and the appropriations committee providing that amount. How did you arrive at the 70 percent number?

*Question 9e.* Is it the position of the Forest Service that simply exceeding 70 percent of the 10 year rolling average of suppression costs equals an emergency or as you are calling it a "disaster?" Please explain.

*Question 9f.* In your reading of S.1875, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, would simply exceeding 70 percent of the 10-year rolling average of suppression costs trigger the wildfire cap adjustment?

*Question 9g.* Is it the position of the Forest Service that a wildfire cap adjustment, like the one proposed in your budget, is necessary to prevent fire borrowing from non-fire accounts, why or why not? Please explain.

*Question 9h.* One of the arguments being made in support of this proposal is that it will allow the agencies to fund more fire prevention activities in its program budget, including hazardous fuel reduction and forest restoration, because now you must only ask for 70 percent of the 10-year average instead of 100 percent? So, for example in prior years, if the 10-year average was \$1 billion, you requested \$1 billion. Now you will request only \$700 million and the \$300 million difference you claim

will be used for forest management activities. Can you outline for me specifically how much of these newly freed up funds have been made available to the Forest Service through the cap adjustment and how you intend to spend it?

*Question 9i.* In your reading of S.1875, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, is there any provision in the bill that would direct funding be spent on fire prevention activities, such as hazardous fuels reduction and forest restoration? Yes or no. If yes, please cite the provision.

#### *Next Generation Airtankers*

It is my understanding that just two of the seven Next Generation airtankers are currently working. The two current vendors with contracts that did supply Next Gen airtankers on time in 2013 have since had four additional line items cancelled from their contracts. It is my understanding that the Forest Service is looking to advertise yet again for additional Next Gen airtankers this fall for flying in 2015.

*Question 10.* Why is the Forest Service failing to offer the additional line items as per the contracts awarded to the two Next Gen vendors that are contract compliant?

*Question 11.* How many gallons of retardant are dropped annually by the Forest Service, and do you have a strategy for delivering it more economically?

*Question 12.* Do you believe there is an associated cost to the Forest Service, and by inference the taxpayer, to contracting large airtankers for single year contracts instead of five to ten year contracts?

*Question 13.* Why are there still unmet contracts for Next Gen airtankers when there are proven, economical large airtankers without long term contracts?

*Question 14.* At present, given the limited size of the Large Airtanker fleet and the unlikelihood of significant growth in the near term, is there anything the Forest Service can do to apply the concepts of force multiplication to the fleet you have currently?

#### *Equipment and Firefighter Expenses*

*Question 15.* Can you tell me how much was expended last fire season on each of these categories of equipment and workers during fire suppression efforts? Please include base pay, overtime, hazard pay, and cost of benefits (including the cost of paying unemployment) in the total. as Also, please include the cost of transporting and housing the overhead and crews while dispatched from their home base.

- a) Fixed wing retardant aircraft;
- b) Fixed wing lead and infrared or fire detection aircraft;
- c) Helicopters by type I and type II;
- d) Bull dozers;
- e) Other support heavy equipment (pumper trucks, water trucks, buses, etc);
- f) Other firefighting equipment or tools ( chainsaws, shovels, pumps, radios etc) used during suppression efforts;
- g) Funds expended to pay for camp equipment and caterers etc.;
- h) Fire crews:
  - 1) Overhead;
  - 2) Smoke jumpers;
  - 3) Type one crews (hot shots);
  - 4) Type two crews;
  - 5) Contract crews (including reimbursement to state or local fire);
  - 6) Any other type of crews;
  - 7) The cost of WO staff, regional office staff, forest supervisor staff, and District overhead working on fires during the fire season.

#### *Coast Guard Planes*

As a result of the 2014 Defense Authorization Act, you will receive seven older C-130 H model airplanes from the Coast Guard.

*Question 16.* Can you tell me what work has been done so far and what remains to be accomplished to complete the transfer and get the planes on the line, fighting fire?

*Question 17.* Does the Forest Service have the means to reduce unit costs, for acres treated or units of wood produced, on acres outside of Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration project areas? Can you describe those to us?

#### QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR BARRASSO

*Question 1.* Does either the Administration proposal or S. 1875 contain language guarantying or specifying funds will be directed to any preventative projects such as hazardous fuels reduction?

*Question 2.* Does either the Administration proposal or S. 1875 contain providing legislative reforms aimed at streamlining active management and reducing litigation?

*Question 3.* Can you describe in some detail the pilot efforts the Forest Service is engaged in to streamline NEPA compliance on larger landscapes? Which forests are involved? How many acres total? What are the expected outputs?

*Question 4.* The Federal Excess Personal Property Program and the Firefighter Property Program are very important to rural communities' ability to fight fires. These programs account for 40% of the wildland firefighting equipment in Wyoming. I understand red tape and uncertainty over emissions regulations between the Department of Defense and the EPA has recently prevented state foresters from acquiring needed surplus military equipment.

What is the Forest Service's role in ensuring this equipment is available and the issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the state foresters and governors?

*Question 5.* I want to inquire about when the Forest Service will issue guidance for implementation of the expanded Good Neighbor Authority provided in the 2014 Farm Bill. At this point we've seen nothing to give the field units the direction to use this new authority, even though it was signed into law in February.

Will National Forest System units be able to use the authority in Fiscal year 2015?

*Question 6.* Can you explain why the three IRR pilot regions have the highest unit costs for each unit of wood produced? Incidentally, their unit costs go up even higher if you factor our personal use firewood, which accounts for up to 40% of the volume in the pilot regions. Why hasn't IRR reduced unit costs after 4 years of effort?

*Question 7.* You're familiar with the mountain pine beetle epidemic that has killed millions of acres of trees in the national forests in Wyoming over the last 15 years. The beetle epidemic threatens our forests and creates the potential for catastrophic fires. There is a tremendous amount of work needed, including salvage of dead trees and thinning ahead of the beetles where the forests are still green. For the last two years, the State of Wyoming appropriated millions of dollars to help fight the beetle epidemic. Private industry has invested millions of dollars into infrastructure to help the Forest Service manage the national forests, especially the Medicine Bow and the Black Hills. The Forest Service timber sale program in Wyoming should be ramping up, not tapering off.

What work is being done by the Forest Service to ensure that the national forests in Wyoming have the resources, tools, and expectation to respond to their full capacity to the mountain pine beetle epidemic in FY 15?

*Question 8.* Last month, 37 members of Congress sent a letter to Secretaries Vilsack and Jewell on the issue of domestic sheep grazing allotments in bighorn sheep core areas. The Governors of Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming also recently sent a letter to Secretary Vilsack outlining their concerns with steps being taken by the Forest Service in Region 4. Both letters stress the need for alternative allotments to be made available to permittees prior to removing domestic sheep from their current allotments.

If relocation is needed, will you commit to making sure permittees have suitable alternative allotments, with an updated NEPA analysis in place prior to removing them from their current allotments?

#### QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR HELLER

News reports earlier this month that discussed that some of the highest risks near power lines and critical infrastructure put some of our Northern Nevada communities and the neighboring communities in California at-risk for rolling black-outs.

*Question 1.* What are your agencies doing to proactively mitigate the risk to critical infrastructure?

*Question 2.* Can the agency mobilize fuel reduction quickly and proactively to treat high-risk areas where a fire could threaten rural communities or critical infrastructure, like power lines or our water delivery infrastructure?

As you know, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency is under a court order to make a listing determination on the Greater Sage-Grouse under the ESA by Sept. 2015. The responsibility of the health of Nevada's sagebrush ecosystem and rangeland-the critical habitat of the Greater sage-grouse-falls almost entirely on the federal land managers that control over 85% of the land in Nevada. While I understand the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service are in the process of making Resource Management Plan amendments to address threats to habitat, such as wildfire, I fear the further restriction of multiple-use of public lands instead of successfully dealing with wildfire, invasive species, predators, and other threats will not be sufficient to prevent



a threatened or endangered listing of the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

*Question 3.* How can we spur faster fuel reduction on lands identified as priority habitat for the sage-grouse? Not enough is being done to truly address wildfire threats to habitat and a listing of the sage-grouse will devastate the rural communities in my state.

As you're aware, we have been working hard to find solutions to reimburse contractors and others who did legitimate work to reduce the risk of wildfires within the Tahoe Basin between 2010 and 2011. This work was done on behalf of the now-defunct Nevada Fire Safe Council. As it currently stands, the issue involves the OIG and Office of General Council, the mingling of funds, as well as bankruptcy proceedings. Since last year, my office, and others in the delegation, have attempted to work with the FS on getting our contractors, subcontractors, chiefs and others reimbursed for the work they accomplished and completed. In March of this year, the Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Chiefs provided a financial document of the unpaid debts of the Council for completed wildlife prevention projects. This has been presented to both the FS and the BLM.

*Question 1.* Please provide a status update on these unpaid debts and how we can address this issue of reimbursement moving forward.

*Question 2.* I would also like confirmation that we will continue to receive the federal support for fuels reduction in the Basin, and elsewhere, this fire season?

#### QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR FLAKE

*Question 1.* Can you explain the Forest Service's slow response to the loss of 56,000 of NEPA-ready acres in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, and specifically what the Forest Service intends to do now to bridge the gap between expiration of the White Mountain Stewardship Contract and the second phase of the Four Forest Restoration Initiative? In short, what is the Forest Service doing to ensure that adequate material is available to allow private industry in Arizona to continue thinning the forests?

*Question 2.* In your testimony, you indicate that the administration's wildfire budget proposal will allow the Forest Service "to stabilize and invest in programs that more effectively restore forested landscapes, treat forests for the increasing effects of climate change, and prepare communities in the WUI for future wildfires." Yet, at least one senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee has indicated that the Committee could use the extra resources to fund "the Land and Water Conservation Fund, resource conservation and energy permitting." What guarantees are there in the administration's proposal that the Appropriations Committee would direct resources to address hazardous fuel reduction?

*Question 3.* If the administration's wildfire budget proposal is effective and fire suppression costs are reduced over time, how does the reduction in suppression costs affect the 30% cap adjustment?

*Question 4.* Is the 10-year average of wildfire suppression costs an accurate tool for estimating budgets?

*Question 5.* If the 10-year average is not accurate, is there a better formula?

*Question 6.* If there is not a better formula, will the Forest Service commit to developing a better budgeting formula?

*Question 7.* Of the times when the Forest Service had to transfer funds from non-fire accounts over the last 10 years, how were those accounts repaid? That is, were those accounts repaid through supplemental appropriations, with an emergency provision, or as part of the 302(b) spending caps in a continuing resolution, or some other mechanism?

*Question 8.* Were those accounts fully repaid?

*Question 9.* If not, how much was not repaid?

*Question 10.* In your testimony, you cite a Forest Service Missoula Fire Lab analysis from 2012 stating that the analysis "showed 58 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands with a high, or very high, potential for a large wildfire that would be difficult for suppression resources to contain." How many of those acres is the Forest Service planning to treat in the next 10 years under existing authorities?

*Question 11.* Is the administration aware that in CBO's analysis of a similar wildfire budgeting proposal it concluded, "[B]ecause the bills also would change the way that the disaster caps are calculated by taking into account certain funds appropriated for wildfire suppression, CBO expects that upward adjustments in the discretionary caps for wildfire suppression would probably exceed reductions in the caps for disaster relief relative to current law."?

*Question 12.* Will the Forest Service commit to working with Senators McCain, Barrasso, and myself on resolving this devastating fire borrowing problem, more accurately funding wildfire suppression, and committing resources to proactive forest restoration?

*Question 13.* Has the Forest Service studied the impact of wildfires on climate change and endangered species?

*Question 14.* How is the Forest Service studying the use of unmanned aerial systems or UAS and their ability to help fight wildfires?

*Question 15.* In 2005, Congress passed the Northern Arizona Land Exchange and Verde River Basin Partnership Act of 2005 (Public Law No. 109-110). Among other things, the law provided for the sale of approximately 237.5 acres of Forest Service land to Young Life. Despite Congressional direction on this specific topic, I now understand that the Forest Service is only offering to sell 213 acres to Young Life. Can you explain the reason for the decision to sell an amount different than what was in the legislation?

*Question 16.* Did both parties, the Forest Service and Young Life, agree to this change?

*Question 17.* Please provide a copy of the map entitled "Yavapai Ranch Land Exchange, Younglife Lost Canyon" dated August 2004.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THOMAS TIDWELL FROM SENATOR HOEVEN

*Question 1.* As we discussed during the stakeholder meeting in my state, the Poudre Wildfire has affected several grazers and I urged you to use your authority to expeditiously move through the Tort Claim process so that grazers can receive appropriate compensation from losses due to a fire caused by the Forest Service. When can ranchers expect to receive reimbursements?

*Question 2.* As you know, wildfires have always been common and widespread in North Dakota. On a broader scale, there are more than 70,000 communities that we know are at risk from wildfire.

Specifically, the State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance Programs are primary federal programs that assist communities to prepare for, and states and local fire departments to respond to, wildfires. We know that state and local resources are often the first to arrive at wildland fires, regardless of where they start—national forests, BLM, private or state lands.

How is your department focusing on helping communities prepare for wildfires in advance and bolstering state and local initial attack resources to help keep unwanted fires, and their costs, as low as possible?

*Question 3.* As you know, I was a member of the Senate and House conference committee which worked to pass a long-term Farm Bill. Included in the bill are several important authorities for the Forest Service which I hope will help reduce the cost of managing forests. Specifically, we included authority for Stewardship Contracting, the Good Neighbor Authority, and the Insect & Disease Infestation provision.

Can you speak to the role of each of these authorities in helping the Forest Service get more work done on the ground, work that is urgently needed to ensure long-term ecological, economic and social health of our forests, communities, and economies?

*Question 4.* Given the importance of domestic energy production to our economy and national security, and recognizing that much of this new energy production is a result of the use of hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling, can you confirm that these two technologies are currently being used to produce energy in US forests? Do you think the Forest Service should ever categorically prohibit oil and gas activity, including the use of these two technologies?

#### QUESTIONS FOR DAN GIBBS FROM SENATOR MANCHIN

*Question 1.* What do think it may take to really get a handle on the massive issues facing forests across your state? You highlight the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and S. 1875 (Wyden-Crapo) as two important things. Do you have any other recommendations for us?

*Question 2.* Do you have an opinion on the possible prioritization of fire-fighting and forest fuels reduction activities, possibly at the expense of other programs that the Forest Service and DOI agencies undertake?

APPENDIX II  
Additional Material Submitted for the Record

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July 25, 2014.

Hon. MARY L. LANDRIEU,  
*Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, 304 Dirksen Senate  
Building, Washington, DC,*

Hon. LISA MURKOWSKI,  
*Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Wash-  
ington, DC.*

Re: Letter for the record, Wildfire Preparedness & Forest Service 2015 Fiscal Year  
Budget hearing of July 15, 2014

DEAR CHAIR LANDRIEU AND RANKING MEMBER MURKOWSKI,

On behalf of our millions of members across the nation, we are writing to express our concerns regarding Senator McCain's S.2593, which was discussed during the July 15, 2014 hearing in the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. This bill undermines existing bipartisan efforts to resolve the longstanding funding crises caused by wildfire suppression and facilitates legislation to mandate prescribed logging levels for National Forests across the United States, while also waiving or severely undermining compliance with federal environmental laws and eliminating the public's ability to seek judicial review of logging projects that may damage their communities.

While Title I—FLAME Act Amendments of S.2593 attempts to provide an additional path forward for addressing the growing costs of wildfire suppression on our nation's public lands, and appropriately acknowledges that existing FLAME funds have inadequately covered these rising costs, this Title is not clear on how it would improve funding of wildfire suppression without continuing to burden existing appropriations to the Department of Interior (DOI) and U.S. Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service (USFS). In sum, Title I does not sufficiently resolve the wildfire funding crisis caused by fire borrowing, and appears to maintain this funding burden on existing limited program budgets. Further, the legislation lacks clear direction on when and how to access a funding Disaster Cap, which could be supplemental to existing appropriations to address wildfire funding.

As you know, the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFA) (S.1875) seeks to improve the way the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior funds the response to emergency fires. This legislation, unlike S.2593 seeks a clear, tangible, and budget neutral solution. Currently, USFS and DOI are the only agencies required to pay for natural disaster response out of their annual discretionary budgets. Since 2000, these agencies have consistently run out of money to fight emergency fires, eight out of the last 13 years. In the last two years alone, more than \$1 billion was "borrowed" from other USFS programs to cover the costs of fire suppression. The depletion of non-suppression programs within USFS and DOI halts important land management activities that could help reduce fire risk and suppression costs in the future.

In May 2014, a DOI report, as required by the FLAME Act of 2009, projected the median cost of fighting fires at nearly \$1.8 billion this year, which is more than \$460 million over the USFS and DOI fire budgets. We need a balanced approach to fire suppression, and the WDFA is a responsible and stable budgeting bill. Federal agencies must be provided the tools and resources to successfully fight fire, this season and always, to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of our nation's forests. Unfortunately, Title I of S.2593 does not get us there in its current form.

In addition, Title II—Forest Treatment Projects of S.2593 is reflective of Senator Barrasso's S.1966, but now applies nationwide, rather than to states only West of the 100th meridian. A more detailed analysis of the provisions included in Title II,

as they are in S.1966 is in the attached Appendix A. However, our organizations oppose Title II because it:

- Eliminates environmental safeguards.—This title waives or severely undermines with important environmental protections, like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and years of collaboratively developed land management plans under the National Forest Management Act and Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act.
- Damages watersheds and pollute drinking water.—Industrialization of public lands through Title II of S.2596 will damage watersheds and pollute drinking water, putting our drinking water supply at risk, as over 50% of fresh water supplies in the West come from federal forests. Intensive logging and other extractive practices dumps sediment into rivers, which can increase costs for local water utilities, cause erosion, and can alter the timing of water availability.<sup>1</sup>
- Harms businesses and jobs that depend on our forests.—The outdoor recreation industry directly supports 6.1 million jobs and contributes over \$646 billion annually to the US economy, including \$39.7 billion to state/local revenues.<sup>2</sup> Damaging these resources will directly impact outdoor-related businesses that generate revenue for counties and employ a range of skilled workers including sport and commercial fisherman, hunters, and anglers. A recent USFS' annual visitor survey showed that national forests attracted 166 million visitors in 2011, and that visitor spending in nearby communities sustained more than 200,000 full- and part-time jobs.
- Liquidates our natural heritage and does not address county funding.—We understand and sympathize with the tight budgets that many local governments are facing. However, this shortsighted proposal may cost taxpayers more than the revenue it generates. It would reestablish the discredited county revenue sharing scheme that was eliminated over a decade ago because of the disastrous economic and ecological impacts it had. It also abandons our nation's vision of and commitment to a strong system of national safeguards to preserve our natural heritage.
- Senseless economics.—Increased federal expenditures may be required in order for the USFS to comply with and implement Title II's requirements to offer for harvest up to 25% of each National Forest's "Logging Emphasis Areas." Moreover, it fails to provide a long-term, sustainable funding solution for our rural communities, and will likely result in counties receiving far less in annual payments that they have received under the Secure Rural Schools program, the current law that provides direct payments to counties without mandated logging requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of these and like concerns regarding S.2593. We understand and appreciate the committee's commitment to addressing major concerns regarding wildfire funding, as expressed in the July 15, 2014 Senate Energy and Natural Resources hearing. However, S.2593 does not sufficiently address or support real solutions to this crisis, and instead acts as a distraction to this pressing funding issue. Instead, we support moving WDFA forward, as a real, bipartisan opportunity to resolving the wildfire funding crisis this year and in perpetuity.

Sincerely,

ATHAN MANUEL,  
*Director of the Public Lands Protection Program, Sierra Club,*

ALAN ROWSOME,  
*Senior Director of Government Relations for Lands, The Wilderness Society,*

MARY BETH BEETHAM,  
*Director of Government Relations, Defenders of Wildlife,*

MARTIN HAYDEN,  
*Vice President, Policy and Legislation, Earthjustice.*

<sup>1</sup> Restoring watersheds where possible from destructive logging can cost taxpayers—including counties—hundreds of millions of dollars a year in lost revenues and vital ecosystem services. For example, in 1996, Salem, Oregon was forced to spend nearly \$100 million on new water treatment facilities after logging fouled the Santiam River with mud and silt. Salem is not alone; up to 124 million people nationwide receive drinking water from national forest watersheds, with an estimated \$4 to \$27 billion annual value.

<sup>2</sup> Outdoor Industry Association, THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY (2012), available at [http://www.outdoorindustry.org/images/researchfiles/OIA\\_OutdoorRecEconomyReport2012.pdf?167](http://www.outdoorindustry.org/images/researchfiles/OIA_OutdoorRecEconomyReport2012.pdf?167).

## APPENDIX A

## S. 1966, SENATOR BARRASSO'S NATIONAL FOREST LOGGING BILL

This bill mandates legislatively prescribed logging levels for each National Forest across most of the western United States, while also waiving or severely undermining compliance with federal environmental laws and eliminating the public's ability to seek judicial review of logging projects that may damage their communities. Legislative timber harvest prescriptions are in direct contravention of the multiple use mandate of the Forest Service, whose land managers must set out—pursuant to locally and collaboratively-developed management plans—how best to manage each individual forest for not only timber production, but also the many vital benefits these lands provide, such as clean drinking water, fish and wildlife habitat, and hunting, fishing, hiking, and other recreational opportunities that support a multi-billion dollar outdoor industry critically important to rural communities and regional economies.

S. 1966 also strives to reinstate the discredited system of linking logging to revenue for counties. This volatile and unreliable resource extraction model was eliminated over a decade ago with the bipartisan passage of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (otherwise known as “Secure Rural Schools” or “SRS”). S. 1966 could decimate our western National Forests for special interests without addressing the true, long-term needs of rural communities.

Just this past September, the Administration echoed these sentiments when it issued a strong veto threat against similar national forest legislation in House bill H.R. 1526. The September 18, 2013 Statement of Administration Policy made clear that the “Administration does not support specifying timber harvest levels in statute, which does not take into account public input, environmental analyses, multiple use management or ecosystem changes” and that it strongly opposes because of “numerous harmful provisions that impair Federal management of federally owned lands and undermines many important existing public land and environmental laws, rules and processes,” which could “significantly harm sound long-term management of these Federal lands for continued productivity and economic benefit as well as for the long-term health of the wildlife and ecological values sustained by these holdings.”<sup>3</sup>

## BULLET POINT SUMMARY

*Sec. 4(a): Legislatively Prescribes Logging Levels*

- Mandates a minimum of 7.5 million acres be logged from national forests in the West during a 15-year period and gives the Secretary of Agriculture sole discretion to establish a much higher level, including up to 25% of each unit's Emphasis Areas. Final logging levels are almost completely immune from review or challenge. Science not politics should dictate logging levels, and the public should be able to weigh in on major decisions like how many millions of acres of national forest land can be logged across the west.
- Authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct logging projects in “Forest Management Emphasis Areas” in each National Forest unit west of the 100th meridian—this impacts national forests in portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas, and all national forests in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Alaska
- “Emphasis Areas” are defined as any national forest land “identified as suitable for timber production in a forest management plan in effect on the date of enactment”—forest plans that are revised after the bill's enactment can only reduce the number of acres designated as suitable for timber harvest if the Secretary of Agriculture determines that it will jeopardize an endangered species (section 4(d)). This provision would completely bar the Forest Service from considering water quality issues, pollution, climate change and other wildlife aspects of forest health in determining logging levels.
- Only areas that are excluded from “Logging Emphasis Areas” are designated wilderness and areas where removal of vegetation is specifically prohibited by federal law—exemptions do not include wilderness study areas, old growth, or other conservation lands, including ecologically sensitive areas unsuitable for harvest that aren't reflected in yet-to-beupdated forest management plan

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/113/saphr1526r\\_20130918.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/113/saphr1526r_20130918.pdf).

- Within 60 days of enactment, Secretary must assign logging requirements (referred to as “acreage treatment requirements”) that covers up to 25% for each Emphasis Area
- Limits Stewardship and Service contracts, as the bill requires that logging projects must be carried out primarily pursuant to the timber sale contracting provision of the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 472a)—if different contracting methods are used, such as stewardship contracting, the USDA Secretary must provide a written record specifying the reasons
- In direct contravention of the National Forest Management Act’s requirement that designation, marking, and supervision of harvesting of trees must be conducted by USDA employees in order to avoid having a conflict of interest in the purchase or harvest of such products (see 16 U.S.C. 472a(g)), the bill allows the Secretary to designate this authority to outside parties such as the timber industry

*Sec. 4(b): Limits Environmental Review and Public Participation*

- Secretary shall comply with NEPA by only completing an Environmental Assessment (EA), even if a more comprehensive review and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are warranted
- EA only has to disclose and analyze the direct effects of each covered project (barred from analyzing the cumulative impacts or indirect effects of covered projects for that national forest unit)
- EA is also not required to study or describe more than the proposed action and 1 additional alternative
- EA can’t exceed 100 pages in length and must be completed within 180 days of published notice of logging project
- Secretary must provide public notice of a covered project and allow opportunity for public comment—no time period is given but given that EA must be completed within 180 days of public notice, comment period will presumably be very short

*Sec. 4(c): Waives ESA Consultation*

- Rather than having to comply with ESA’s section 7 requirements to consult with expert wildlife officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the bill requires USDA to only consult within its own staff on the Forest Service to make potential wildlife jeopardy determinations resulting from covered logging projects
- This “self-consultation” is not consultation at all and essentially waives compliance with the ESA
- USDA is also given authority to make jeopardy determinations regarding timber harvest levels—while the bill does call for consultation with DOI on this one issue (see section 4(d)), it appears to move the determination about jeopardy to USDA, a complete shift from current practice and wholly contrary to ESA’s requirements that call for US FWS to make the determination as to when something will or will not jeopardize an endangered species

*Sec. 5: Eliminates Judicial Review and Sets up Biased Arbitration Process*

- Citizens can only seek administrative review of a covered project pursuant to the limited administrative review process under section 105 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003
- Public’s ability to seek judicial review of harmful logging projects is waived
- Instead, a special arbitration process (that must be completed within 90 days) is the “sole means” by which to challenge a decision made following the special administrative review process
- Request for arbitration must be filed within 30 days after the administrative review decision is issued and objector must include a proposal containing changes sought to the covered project (changes could include making the project larger and more damaging)
- Arbitration process would allow anyone who submitted a public comment on the project to intervene in the arbitration by submitting a proposal supporting or modifying the covered project (which could include making the project larger and more damaging) within 30 days of arbitration request
- United States District Court in the district where project is located must appoint the arbitrator
- Arbitrator cannot modify any of the proposals submitted under this section and must select a proposal submitted by the objector or an intervening party—arbitrator must select the proposal that best meets the purpose and needs described in the Environmental Assessment for the project (which biases the decision to-

ward the proposal that allows the logging project or even a potentially more harmful project to be carried out)

- Arbitrator's decision is binding, shall not be subject to judicial review, and shall not be considered a major Federal action (which would foreclose additional NEPA review even if an objector or intervenor's new proposal is selected that has additional impacts not previously analyzed and disclosed in the Environmental Assessment for the original project)

*Sec. 6: Sets up Revenue Sharing System Linked to Commodity Extraction*

- Provides that 25% of the revenues derived from covered projects will be distributed to counties
- Reestablishes the discredited 25 percent revenue sharing system that was eliminated over a decade ago with the creation of Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program, which provides direct payments to counties without linking to timber receipts
- Allows some counties to "double dip" since in addition to the 25% revenue sharing payments that counties would receive from covered projects under S. 1966, some counties would still also receive their payments under the Twenty-Five Percent Fund Act of 1908

July 18, 2014.

Hon. MARY LANDRIEU,  
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources, 304 Dirksen  
Senate Building, Washington, DC,

Hon. LISA MURKOWSKI,  
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Wash-  
ington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN LANDRIEU AND RANKING MEMBER MURKOWSKI,

The Wilderness Society appreciates the Committee's interest in addressing budgetary problems relating to the Forest Service's fire management funding, as were discussed at the July 15 hearing on Wildfire Preparedness and the Forest Service Fiscal Year 2015 Budget. Please include these comments regarding S. 1875 and S. 2593 in the hearing record.

BACKGROUND

Extreme droughts and climate change have produced longer fire seasons and larger wildfires in much of the West. However, federal funding has not kept pace with need and the increased costs of fighting or preventing these fires. Robbing Peter to pay Paul, the Forest Service has had to "borrow" funds from other key programs, including fuels management and recreation, in order to cover the costs of fire-fighting that exceed the amount appropriated by Congress. The Forest Service predicts that this fire season will cost half a billion dollars more than they have on hand. In this fiscal climate, it is impossible to transfer such a significant amount of resources away from other programs in the height of the summer field work and recreation season without seriously compromising management of our national forests.

In 1991, the cost of wildfire management represented 13 percent of the U.S. Forest Service budget—today it consumes nearly 50 percent. For years the Forest Service has had to borrow billions of dollars from critical conservation programs to fund wildfire suppression because Congress has not allocated enough funding. The Forest Service has then had to depend on Congress to pass emergency supplemental funding bills to repay the programs that were raided. The current fire funding system has been debilitating to the Forest Service, frustrating to the public and many businesses that use our national forests, and has exacerbated the already intensified wildfire season.

S. 1875

The Wilderness Society strongly supports S. 1875, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2013, co-sponsored by Senators Wyden and Crapo. This bill provides a bipartisan, budget-neutral mechanism for Congress to budget responsibly for fighting wildfires, in the same way Congress budgets for all other natural disasters.

S. 1875 would fund a portion of the Forest Service's and Interior Department's wildfire suppression costs through a budget cap adjustment similar to the cap adjustment currently in use by the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. Fighting wildfires

would be funded with the same mechanism currently used to combat all other natural disasters. This bill will not change federal fire suppression policies or strategies and will not change the cost of fire suppression, and thus the Congressional Budget Office has reported that it would have a neutral impact on federal spending in the fiscal year 2015 federal budget. The Act would provide a reliable funding structure, allowing us to address catastrophic wildfires as the natural disasters they truly are.

S. 2593

We have serious concerns about portions of S. 2593, the FLAME Act Amendments of 2014, co-sponsored by Senators McCain, Barrasso, and Flake. In particular, we strongly oppose 'Title II—Forest Treatment Projects' because we believe it poses a serious threat to environmental stewardship, public involvement, wildlife conservation, and the rule of law in our national forests. Title II is virtually identical to language in S. 1966, Senator Barrasso's "National Forest Jobs and Management Act," which was introduced on January 28 and was the subject of a SENR Committee hearing on February 6.<sup>1</sup>

First, the Forest Treatment Projects title of S. 2593 is aimed at increasing timber production, not at reducing fuels and fire risk. Reflecting S. 1966's objective to "create a sustainable wood supply" from the national forests, the bill directs the Forest Service to emphasize sawtimber and pulpwood outputs. Title II makes no mention of fuel or fire risk reduction as a desired outcome of the required commercial logging.

Second, S. 2593 would hamper the Forest Service's ability to accomplish forest restoration and multiple-use management by giving the agency a legal mandate to achieve the bill's ambitious commercial logging targets. The bill's legally binding mandate to conduct mechanical treatments on 7.5 million acres in 15 years—nearly three times more than current treatment levels—could exacerbate the fire-borrowing problem by requiring the Forest Service to divert resources away from non-commercial fuels work and all other environmental stewardship activities in the national forests.

Third, S. 2593 would increase public controversy and environmental conflicts by establishing more than 40 million acres of "Forest Management Emphasis Areas" in the national forests. The designated timberlands potentially include forests located in Inventoried Roadless Areas, Northwest Forest Plan Late Successional Reserves, and other sensitive lands that have been administratively protected for more than a decade. The bill would also prohibit the Forest Service from reducing the amount of suitable timberlands through revisions of local forest plans unless necessary to avoid jeopardizing an endangered species, thereby limiting management options available to the agency and the public in the planning process.

Fourth, S. 2593 would short-cut public participation and environmental review by weakening requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The bill specifies that Forest Service environmental assessments would only be required to consider the "direct environmental effects" of each project, implying that indirect and cumulative effects analysis normally required under NEPA would no longer be done. The bill also specifies that the Forest Service is only required to evaluate the proposed agency action and one alternative, rather than a range of alternatives normally considered in environmental impact statements.

In addition, the bill apparently would eliminate the interagency consultation process required by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act as applied to the bill's "covered projects." Rather than consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the bill provides that Forest Service professional staff members will make the determinations required by Section 7 of the ESA, presumably including the key determination that a covered project will not jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species.

Finally, we are very concerned about the bill's proposal to establish a pilot program authorizing the use of an arbitration process and eliminating the opportunity for judicial review of covered projects. The proposed arbitration process provides no means to ensure that the Forest Service is actually following environmental laws—i.e. it would authorize "logging without laws." The arbitrator would not be able to consider and rule on the legal adequacy of the process by which the agency arrived at its decision. Conceivably, a local district ranger and forest supervisor could entirely skip normal public involvement and Endangered Species Act requirements in order to achieve their legally-mandated mechanical treatment targets.

<sup>1</sup>The Wilderness Society submitted detailed comments on S. 1966 for the record of the February 6 hearing.



In conclusion, The Wilderness Society strongly supports S. 1875 and adamantly opposes the Forest Treatment Projects title of S. 2593.

Sincerely,

ALAN H. ROWSOME,  
*Senior Director of Government Relations for Lands.*

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