



# Wildfire Disaster Funding Act

## STABLE, EFFICIENT, RESPONSIBLE WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION FUNDING

Wildfire at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, credit: Josh O'Connor, USFWS

**A fire funding solution, like the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, would create a stable budget approach that 1) funds wildfires with disaster funding, 2) minimizes impacts from borrowing, and 3) addresses the increasing costs of suppression over time, allowing for reinvestment into forest health activities.**

Over the past two decades, fires have increased in severity, intensity and cost, and the fire seasons have grown longer. However, the structure for wildfire budgeting has not changed and is significantly impacting important non-fire programs. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) are responsible for federal fire-fighting response and bear the full burden for funding those activities from their annual budgets.

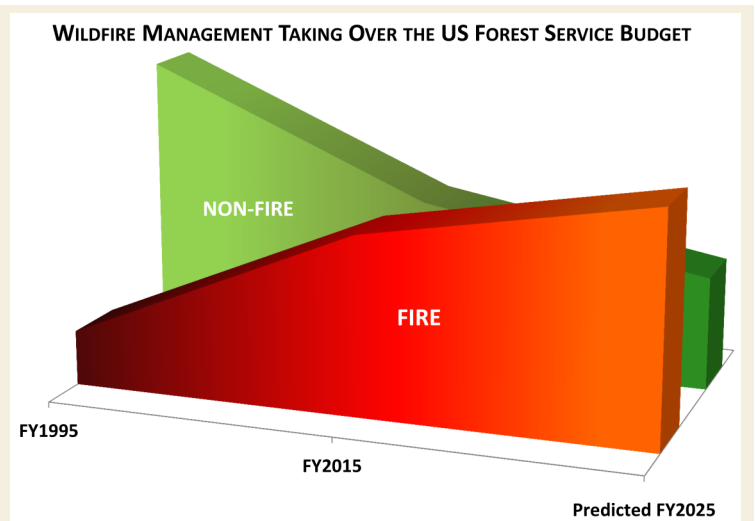
When suppression costs run high, appropriators are forced to shift funding to the ever-increasing proportion of the budget that is devoted to fire suppression, leaving less for programs that restore and manage forests.

Often, that funding is still not sufficient, which forces the agencies to borrow money from other programs to make up the difference. This practice of funding non-fire programs less and then “robbing Peter to pay Paul” has led to decreased budgets for many important programs such as the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and even Forest Service projects aimed at decreasing the severity of wildfires in the first place.

**An approach like the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act will fix this inefficiency and reduce the devastating impacts that fire borrowing have had on people, water and wildlife.**

### Fire Suppression, by the Numbers

- In 1995, fire management accounted for 16% of the USFS budget; today it is more than half. At the current rate, it is expected to make up two-thirds of the agency's budget by 2025.
- USFS and DOI have run short on fire-fighting **twelve** times since 2002.
- USFS transferred **ten** times since 2002; \$700 million in September, 2015.





French Fire at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, credit: National Park Service



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Nevada wildfire, credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## A fire funding solution must include all of the following:

- 1) A full 100 percent of *normal* fire funding activities will continue to be funded through the appropriations process (the 99 percent of wildfires that are predictable).
- 2) Additional firefighting activities would be funded using disaster funding similar to that currently used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for natural disasters.
- 3) The practice of borrowing or transferring funds from non-suppression accounts to make up for funding shortfalls would be minimized.

## **The bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFa) meets these criteria by amending the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.**

In addition, any forest management proposal that may be linked to fire funding must emphasize science-based restoration that promotes collaboration.

Fixing the fire funding problem will ensure that the increasing costs of firefighting do not continue to drain other programs, and will allow appropriators new flexibility to reinvest in restoration programs.

## **Broad, Bipartisan Support**

WDFa is the most widely supported fire funding solution in Congress today. It addresses the problems of transfers and increasing suppression costs by accessing disaster funding.

More than 300 organizations representing a diverse range of interests support WDFa, including conservation, sportsmen, timber, tribal, firefighting, and recreation groups.

There are currently more than 150 bipartisan members of the House and Senate cosponsoring the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.

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