

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell,

Many Members of Congress are concerned about the costly practice of fire borrowing. As we continue to work with our colleagues in the House of Representatives to end this practice, we would like to urge the Senate to take up similar legislation.

As you know, most of the American West is still experiencing severe drought conditions which has significantly increased the danger for damaging wildfires. These wildfires cause serious damage to property and threaten lives. In 2015, more than 10 million acres were burned by wildfires. Federal land agencies borrowed nearly \$700 million from land management and other important activities to fight these fires. This leaves these agencies with fewer resources to conduct thinning, timber harvests, and controlled burns which can reduce the severity of these wildfires.

Before the 2016 fire season begins, we believe it is critical that Congress change the way in which we provide funds to the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Interior to fight catastrophic wildland fires. In seven of the past 10 years, the costs of fighting wildfires has exceeded the Forest Service's firefighting budget. This forced the agency to borrow funds intended for forest management practices.

In addition, the portion of firefighting costs out of the U.S. Forest Service budget has risen steadily over the past 20 years. In 2015, wildland fire suppression costs were more than 50 percent of the Forest Service's total budget. Redirecting funds to firefighting takes funds away from other important programs that can help land managers more actively manage forests to reduce the risk of future wildland fires.

We believe that Congress needs to address this problem through legislation that would treat wildfires like other natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes. This change would eliminate the need for the Forest Service to use funds appropriated for other programs to cover the costs of fighting wildfires.

The House has shown strong support to end fire-borrowing and we are committed to addressing this problem during the remaining months of the 114th Congress. We hope that you will do the same and take action to give the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior the ability to fight wildland fires without limiting their ability to carry out the rest of their missions. We stand to ready to work with you to fix this critical problem.

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