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October 19, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Leader Reid:

On behalf of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the bipartisan organization representing the legislatures of our nation's states, commonwealths, territories, possessions and the District of Columbia, we urge the U.S. Senate to make changes to the budget mechanisms for how our federal government currently funds wildfire suppression. These mechanisms deplete resources from vital fire prevention and mitigation programs, including forest restoration and management activities to reduce future fire risk.

Legislation, such as S.235, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, is necessary to ensure our country is able to quickly respond to wildfires while maintaining a sufficient budget for wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts.

The U.S. Forest Service recently released a report entitled "The Rising Costs of Wildfire Operations," which showed that for the first time in its 110-year history the agency was spending more than 50 percent of its budget on fire suppression costs. Due to these rising costs, the U.S. Forest Service has had to transfer more than \$1 billion from other preventative programs in its budget to pay for fighting wildfires. Meanwhile, all reports indicate that wildfires will continue to burn at a rapid pace, with some projections showing twice as many acres will be burned by 2050 as are burned today.

Increased fire activity can have substantially negative impacts on air and water quality as well as reduce downstream water storage as sediment runoff lowers the effective level of dams and reservoirs. These fires also make it easier for invasive pests and diseases to infest vulnerable forests. Ultimately, increased risk for wildfires on federal lands will lead to increased costs for state wildfire programs across the United States.

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We urge the Senate to act expeditiously to fix the inadequate discrepancies in wildfire funding and support congressional action to fund wildfires similar to natural disasters. NCSL looks forward to working with your members to ensure such language passes the Senate. With millions of acres currently burning in the west and homes being destroyed, Congress cannot wait any longer to fix these issues. Please contact Ben Husch ([ben.husch@ncsl.org](mailto:ben.husch@ncsl.org)) or Melanie Condon ([melanie.condon@ncsl.org](mailto:melanie.condon@ncsl.org)) for any additional information.

Sincerely,



Delegate Sally Jameson  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Co-Chair, NCSL Natural Resources and  
Infrastructure Committee



Senator Cam Ward  
Alabama Senate  
Co-Chair, NCSL Natural Resources and  
Infrastructure Committee

Attached: [NCSL's Wildfire Funding Resolution](#)