



NATIONAL CONFERENCE *of* STATE LEGISLATURES

*The Forum for America's Ideas*

October 26, 2017

**Deb Peters**  
*Senator – District 9  
South Dakota  
President, NCSL*

**Chuck Truesdell**  
*Fiscal Analyst  
Office of Budget Review  
Legislative Research Commission  
Kentucky  
Staff Chair, NCSL*

**William T. Pound**  
*Executive Director*

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker of the House  
Office of the Speaker  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Democratic Leader  
Office of the Democratic Leader  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Federal Wildfire Funding

On behalf of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the bipartisan organization representing the legislatures of our nation's states, territories and commonwealths, we urge Congress to address the insufficient budget mechanism for how the 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.

The current method of funding has proven to be unsustainable – taking funds from mitigation efforts only leaves more fuel in the forests for future fires to burn, exacerbating an already devastating situation. In 2015, the U.S. Forest Service 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. However, the costs have only continued to grow, with suppression costs for FY 2017 exceeding \$2 billion – 55 percent of the Forest Service's budget – and making it the most expensive year on record.

Thus far in 2017, [more than](#) 8.8 million acres of land has burned, threatening to become the worst year on record, rivaling 2015 which saw more than 9.3 million acres of land destroyed. This increased fire activity can have substantially negative effects on both air and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and greenhouse gas emissions, in addition to reducing downstream water storage as sediment runoff lowers the effective level of dams and reservoirs. Furthermore,

Oct. 26, 2017  
p. 2

it can make it easier for invasive pests and diseases to infest vulnerable forests because of depleted restoration and mitigation funds.

We urge you to reach a legislative solution by the end of 2017 that addresses the budget structure of wildland fire accounts by minimizing the risk of fire transfers from prevention and mitigation programs, and support federal actions that would fund catastrophic wildfires similar to natural disasters. If you have any additional questions or concerns please contact Ben Husch ([ben.husch@ncsl.org](mailto:ben.husch@ncsl.org)) or Kristen Hildreth ([kristen.hildreth@ncsl.org](mailto:kristen.hildreth@ncsl.org)). We look forward to working with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Representative Curt McCormack  
NCSL Natural Resources and Infrastructure  
Committee Co-Chair  
Vermont House of Representatives



Representative Ed Orcutt  
NCSL Natural Resources and Infrastructure  
Committee Co-Chair  
Washington House of Representatives

Enclosures (1)  
[Wildfire Funding Policy Resolution](#)