

September 15, 2008

Chairman Robert C. Byrd  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Capitol  
Room S-131  
Washington, DC 20510-6025

Senator Thad Cochran, Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Capitol  
Room S-131  
Washington, DC 20510-6025

Dear Chairman Byrd and Senator Cochran:

We, the undersigned, urge you to provide emergency supplemental appropriations to cover US Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) wildland fire operations costs above originally appropriated amounts. In the absence of adequate firefighting funding, the USFS has been forced to move \$400 million from non-fire accounts to support fire suppression efforts. This has disrupted or completely stopped many important programs, projects and cooperative agreements benefiting public and private forests, including forest management, wildlife habitat, conservation, and research activities, many of which help prevent or minimize wildfires. This has eroded agency partnerships and credibility with communities and organizations that help it accomplish its goals.

To date, the USFS and DOI combined have spent over \$1.3 billion on fire suppression activities, controlling wildfires on over 4.6 million acres. As you are aware, the 2008 wildfire season in California began much earlier and proceeded with greater intensity than it had in previous years. This increased and prolonged wildfire activity, along with large fires in North Carolina and across the Southwest, has once again strained USFS and DOI finances. Now that we are in the midst of a very active hurricane season, we will likely see an increased need for supplemental funding as USFS takes on greater responsibility for hurricane response and recovery efforts.

The current fire funding crisis underscores the importance of developing a long-term solution to correct the way in which fire suppression funds are budgeted. We urge Congress to provide these supplemental funds to prevent further short-term financial damage, and at the same time, address the more challenging issue of finding a budget fix to end this six-year cycle of emergency supplemental funding. We are committed to working with Congress and the Administration to craft a comprehensive solution.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Community Trees  
American Fisheries Society  
American Forests  
American Forest Foundation  
American Forest & Paper Association  
American Forest Resource Council  
Appalachian Mountain Club  
Association of Consulting Foresters  
Black Hills Forest Resource Association  
Black Hills Regional Multiple Use Coalition  
Campfire Club of America  
Colorado Forestry Association  
Colorado Timber Industry Association  
Conservation Force  
Ecological Society of America  
Forest Landowners Association  
Forest Resources Association  
Idaho Conservation League  
Intermountain Forest Association  
Meeteteetse Conservation District  
Mississippi Land Trust  
Moosalamoo Association  
National Alliance of Forest Owners  
National Association of Conservation Districts  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees  
National Association of State Foresters  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
National Woodland Owners Association  
Northern Forest Alliance  
Pinchot Institute for Conservation  
Public Lands Council  
Quail Unlimited  
Ruffed Grouse Society  
Society for Range Management  
Society of American Foresters  
Sustainable Northwest  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Pacific Forest Trust  
Trust for Public Lands  
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance  
Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association  
Vermont Youth Conservation Corps  
Wildlife Forever  
Wildlife Mississippi  
The Wildlife Society  
Wyoming Timber Industry Association