

March 26, 2008

The Honorable Nick Rahall  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall,

The undersigned organizations are writing to express support for H.R. 5541, the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act. By establishing a new federal fund to be used only for suppression of catastrophic emergency wildland fires, this bill will help to move land management agencies towards a sustainable suppression funding mechanism better suited to deal with the escalating costs of fighting truly catastrophic fires.

The cost of suppressing fires has grown enormously in recent years and projections indicate that this trend will only increase as a result of hazardous fuels build-up, climate change, and increasingly populated wildland-urban interface areas. For example, the US Forest Service (USFS) has spent over \$1 billion per year in five of the last seven years to extinguish fires. Wildland fire management activities (the largest component of which is suppression) rose from 13 percent of the agency's budget in fiscal year 1991 to a staggering 48 percent projected for fiscal year 2009.

These escalating costs have had a significant impact on the USFS and Department of the Interior (DOI), which are charged with wildland fire protection. Due to their budgets remaining essentially flat or declining from year-to-year, these agencies have consistently drained their other core programs in order to sufficiently fund fire suppression at the required 10-year rolling average level. Even with the diversion of funds, the agencies are regularly compelled to request supplemental funding from Congress each fire season and are forced to transfer already limited dollars from other essential agency programs. Such transfers further reduce program budgets and lead to program disruptions, project cancellations, and strained relationships with partners.

The emergency fund created by the proposed FLAME Act will reduce the need to deplete other agency programs to pay for suppression and will provide more assured funding than uncertain year-to-year emergency supplementals. We are pleased to see Congress requiring a high level of accountability via the reporting requirements listed in the bill, ensuring that this fund will *not* become a 'blank check' for the agency, but rather a key mechanism for isolating the costs of those largest, most catastrophic of fires that wreak havoc on agency budgets year after year.

We greatly appreciate the leadership that you have demonstrated in developing this legislation. The FLAME Act is an important first step in addressing the escalating costs of catastrophic wildland fires. We also recognize the efforts of the Agriculture Committee to work towards finding solutions for this grave problem. We look forward to providing any assistance that may be useful as you work to pass this important legislation in a bipartisan manner to address the long-term wildfire suppression funding situation.

Sincerely,

c.c.

The Honorable Rob Bishop

The Honorable Norman Dicks

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva

The Honorable Collin Peterson

The Honorable Todd Tiarht

The Honorable Don Young