



January 17, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi,  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

The nation's outdoor recreation industry urges Congress to reform the federal wildfire suppression funding formula through the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. Action is needed now to provide stability for long-term wildfire mitigation practices and to protect other vital public interests in our nation's forests. Using 10-year average suppression costs for budgeting constrains non-suppression federal agency efforts, including recreation. This jeopardizes public lands recreation programs vital to our segment of the US economy, estimated at \$887 billion per annum by the Outdoor Industry Association.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, wildfire suppression costs surpassed \$2.3 billion this year and more than 8.5 million acres burned, including vital recreation infrastructure. Fire suppression activities continue to rise as a percentage of the Forest Service's budget. This rise has reduced investments in trails, campgrounds and other recreation infrastructure, much of which needs modernization and expansion. Mid-year borrowing from other accounts including recreation construction and operation to meet firefighting costs has forced systemwide reductions in Congressionally-approved agency recreation efforts, adversely impacting the experiences of millions and having harmful consequences for gateway communities. Even where Congressional action has provided some repayment of the deferred recreation funds, delays in construction and maintenance have added costs and disappointed forest visitors.

The Forest Service reports that 80 million acres of its land are at high risk of catastrophic fire. The appropriate response is to reduce this threat by increasing the pace and scale of proactive forest management. One of the largest impediments to these efforts is the increasing cost of firefighting and the resulting cuts to other non-fire programs. In the last two decades, the number of national forest employees has

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dropped from 19,000 to 11,000 while the number of firefighters has doubled. The agency anticipates that it will devote more than 66% of its budget to firefighting by 2021, compared to 16% in 1995. The rising cost of firefighting creates two funding problems for the Forest Service:

- 1) The primary problem is that the 10-year average through which Congress funds fighting wildfires is outdated, resulting in an increasing amount directed toward fire suppression efforts and less funding available to keep forests healthy.
- 2) Under the current approach to pay for fire suppression, the Forest Service is routinely forced to transfer funds from non-fire programs when suppression funds are exhausted before the end of the Fiscal Year.

Disruptions to funding undermine both long-term wildfire mitigation strategies and a comprehensive strategy for providing the public with optimal benefits from its federal lands. For several decades, it has been documented that recreation is the greatest single economic contributor of national forests to the nation, yet this contributor is being seriously hampered.

The rising costs of the 10-year average formula are shifting approximately \$100 million annually from non-fire accounts including recreation to meet fire needs. We strongly support a comprehensive fix to the challenges of the rising costs of fire suppression, and the complicating challenges of mid-season fire transfers.

We ask for your immediate action on a comprehensive and permanent solution to the surging, nearly uncontrolled cost of forest firefighting. The Congress has proposals with bipartisan support pending: The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. Action is needed now.

Thank you.

American Fly Fishing Trade Association  
American Recreation Coalition  
American Sportfishing Association  
Archery Trade Association  
Association of Marina Industries  
Boat Owners Association of the United States  
International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association  
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas  
Motorcycle Industry Council  
National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds

National Marine Manufacturers Association  
National Park Hospitality Association  
National Shooting Sports Foundation  
Outdoor Industry Association  
PeopleForBikes  
Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association  
Recreation Vehicle Industry Association  
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association  
Snowsports Industries America  
Specialty Equipment Market Association  
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America  
Sports & Fitness Industry Association

cc: The Honorable Ron Wyden  
The Honorable Mike Enzi  
The Honorable Steve Womack  
The Honorable K. Michael Conaway  
The Honorable Rob Bishop  
The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
The Honorable Mick Mulvaney

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson  
The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
The Honorable John Yarmuth  
The Honorable Collin C. Peterson  
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva  
The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
U.S. Forest Service Chief Tony Tooke