



STATE OF WASHINGTON

July 29, 2014

Dear Members of the Washington State Congressional Delegation:

Thank you for your support as our state continues to battle devastating wildfires in Central and Eastern Washington. We write you today to request your support for \$615 million in supplemental funding for U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOI) fire suppression activities, and for a change in policy to allow access to emergency funds when they are needed to fight these disasters.

While July is traditionally known as the start of the Western fire season, this year we have already battled the largest wildfire in our state's history. Other states are also fighting fires, and with the bulk of fire season still before us we are concerned about depleting the federal resources that are needed to help respond and protect our people, communities and natural resources. According to a congressionally-mandated report issued in May, the USFS and USDOI are projected to spend \$470 million more than is currently available to fight wildfires this year. As fire season rages on this year, and in future years, federal agencies must have access to the resources they need to fight and also prevent fires in our state and others.

The USFS and USDOI have worked in close partnership with state and local jurisdictions as invaluable allies in responding to Washington State's July 2014 firestorm. As you are undoubtedly aware, this year's impending resource constraints are not unique. Due to more frequent and increasingly devastating fires, USFS wildfire management needs have risen from 13 percent of the agency's total FY 1991 budget to nearly 50 percent today. In spite of this trend, the USFS and USDOI have still lacked sufficient funds to pay for wildfire suppression, forcing them to transfer more than \$1 billion from other programs to cover this shortfall in the past two years alone.

While these budgets transfers are essential to battling wildfires, they also have adverse effects on nearly all other USFS programs, and directly impede federal agencies' important work to reduce fire hazards and help prevent dangerous fires from occurring in the first place. In fact, the first of Washington's large wildfires this year, called Mills Canyon, burned through an area of National Forestland where hazard reduction treatments were being planned. We are left to imagine how many projects like this one could have been implemented if fire suppression had not been allowed to consume so much of agency budgets for prevention activities. In the month of July alone, more money has been spent on fire suppression in Washington state than would be spent in roughly two years on land management and prevention efforts, at current budget levels.



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As you may also know, the pattern of extreme wildfires is expected to worsen throughout the coming decades, in Washington and elsewhere. Longer, drier and more extreme fire seasons have long been forecast as a consequence of climate change. Specific to our region, the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group has projected that the average annual acres burned in the Pacific Northwest will double by 2020, and could quadruple in outlying years.

In the face of increasing needs for fire suppression and critical investments in land management and community protection, Congress should allow the agencies' most complicated fires to be funded from an "emergency" account, outside of discretionary appropriations. This structure is similar to how the Federal Emergency Management Agency pays for the costs of other natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods.

This needed reform carries broad bipartisan support. President Barack Obama requested this policy change as part of his Fiscal Year 2015 budget, and requested it of Congress once again in his July 2014 request for emergency supplemental appropriations. Legislation to implement this change – the *Wildfire Disaster Funding Act* (S. 1875 and H.R. 3992) – enjoys broad bipartisan cosponsorship, including more than 120 cosponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bills also enjoy support from a 160-member Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions comprised of state and local government, forestry, wildland firefighting, environmental, recreation and sportsmen's organizations. Few issues are as timely and imperative among such diverse interests.

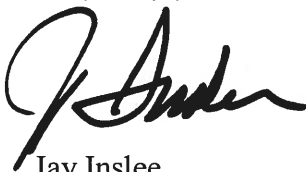
In order to provide sufficient resources for wildfire suppression this year – in Washington and our fellow states – and to ensure access to necessary resources in cases of emergency, we ask your support for the President's request for legislative action to provide supplemental appropriation for USFS fire suppression activities, and to allow the agency to access emergency funding in times of need.

As our state continues to battle wildfires, we thank you for your support in obtaining a Presidential Emergency Declaration to provide federal support in the ongoing response to the Carlton and Chiwaukum Complex fires, and we thank you in advance for your future support for federal assistance for communities and infrastructure that were damaged in these disasters.

Clearly there is a growing need for increasing our commitment to wildfire suppression and prevention, and to funding these activities in a smarter way.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee
Governor



Peter Goldmark
Commissioner of Public Lands