

State Fire Assistance

Key to Successful Comprehensive Wildfire Management

State Fire Assistance (SFA) is a key part of a long-term strategy to reduce wildfire suppression costs by providing funds for proactive community planning, fuels mitigation, preparedness, and education.

Projects results from SFA include:

- ❖ The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment, developed by the Southern Group of State Foresters, is a comprehensive planning tool to prioritize projects - allowing scarce resources to be used needed most.
 - ❖ Over 1,100 Community Wildfire Protection Plans covering over 3,300 communities to help prioritize wildfire mitigation efforts.
 - ❖ On-the-ground high-priority hazard mitigation projects in communities at risk to help achieve the goals of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act by treating hazardous fuels where most necessary – in the WUI – reducing the need for costly, and dangerous, fire suppression near homes. Since FY02, 470,000 acres of hazardous fuels have been treated in and around communities using SFA funding.
 - ❖ Preparedness funds that help ensure faster local response to wildland fires, including those on federal lands so that fewer fires become large needed costly federal suppression actions. Since FY02, 165,000 wildland firefighters have received specific inter-agency training.
- **State Fire Assistance bridges the gap between communities and federal agencies.** Over 45,000 communities have been identified at-risk from wildland fire, SFA brings federal agencies together with states and communities to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans
 - **State Fire Assistance generates a positive return on federal investment.** Federal funds through SFA are matched dollar-for-dollar from states and other sources, including donated labor from businesses at the local level. In many cases, matching contributions exceed the required amount. Further, state and local firefighting resources provide a significant amount of the resources used to fight fires on federal land, potentially upwards of 15-20 %. SFA allows States and local governments to make their resources available to the federal government at half the cost.
 - **State Fire Assistance is declining, while the wildfire threat continues to increase.** Funding for SFA has decreased since FY04 and in each of the years FY05-FY07 the President's Budget has recommended cuts of over \$20 million to this program. Fortunately Congress has not agreed with such drastic reductions, but for FY07 that meant a proposed 30% reduction.
 - **State Fire Assistance already falls short of the need and further declines threatens the ability of communities to protect themselves.** In FY05, the Forest Service reported assisting over 19,000 communities, only a fraction of the communities at risk. At current funding levels, assuming a conservative 45,000 communities-at risk-means each community would receive only a little over \$1,700, not nearly enough to accomplish meaningful fire planning, mitigation or preparedness.

The recently updated *Implementation Plan for the 10-year Strategy* demonstrates the needed investment in SFA. SFA is the primary federal vehicle for community fire assistance – Goal IV of the 10-year strategy – which is the most important aspect of creating wildfire-ready communities in fire-adapted landscapes. Effective wildland fire management requires partnerships between agencies and communities, which can only occur with increased funding for State Fire Assistance and clearly coordinating efforts for fuels reduction activities on federal and state and private lands. The National Association of State Foresters estimates that **funding for fiscal year 2008 must be increased to \$145 million to ensure successful wildland fire preparedness and management across the landscape. While budget constraints may not support this much of an increase over previous years, the number should be considered as an accurate reflection of funding needs and much of it would be offset by suppression cost savings derived from the efficiency of state and local first responders in initial attack.**