

March 27, 2007

The Honorable Robert Byrd, Chairman
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
United States Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Chairman
The Honorable Larry Craig, Ranking Member
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
United States House Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Byrd, Ranking Member Cochran, Chairman Feinstein and Ranking Member Craig:

The respective organizations identified in this letter represent a coalition with the shared goal of improved state and community wildfire protection. The State Fire Assistance Program (SFA), as funded through State and Private Forestry and Wildland Fire Management under the USDA Forest Service, provides critical cost sharing to state forestry agencies that helps to facilitate successful wildland fire preparedness and management by integrating state and private lands into landscape-scale fuel mitigation and planning.

In recent years SFA has been the subject of recurring reductions proposed by the Administration. The Administration proposed a 30 percent reduction in SFA for FY 2007 and a 14 percent reduction for FY 2008. We are appreciative that your Committee has consistently provided stable appropriations responsive to on-the-ground realities. This coalition again requests your leadership to restore and enhance SFA funding. The National Association of State Foresters has estimated SFA funding needs at \$145 million for FY 2008 to reflect current and emerging community wildland fire preparedness and protection needs. Although the diverse undersigned groups individually support varying levels of funding for SFA, all agree that the SFA is a vital component of effective community wildland fire preparedness and mitigation.

The State Fire Assistance Program is the fundamental federal assistance program that States use to develop preparedness and response capabilities for wildland fire. Improved response efficiency provided through State Fire Assistance funding is critical to reducing suppression costs, which have skyrocketed of late, reaching over \$1 billion in four of the last seven years. Since FY 2002 about 165,000 wildland firefighters have received training through SFA. This training has enhanced interagency coordination for wildland fire management on state, federal and private lands. Moreover, wildland-urban interface hazardous fuel reduction is a major component of the SFA program and funds have been used by communities to mitigate high-priority hazard fuel loads on 470,000 acres within the Wildland Urban Interface.

Lastly, SFA is an essential funding source for the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). As of early 2006, thanks to significant SFA funding, over 1,100 CWPPs covering over 3,300 communities have been developed, enabling communities to prioritize their preparedness and mitigation efforts on both private and federal lands. However, current analyses such as the SFA-funded *Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment* estimate that more than 45,000 communities are

still at risk. At current funding levels, that would mean each of these communities would receive only about \$1,700. In addition, Western State Fire Managers were only able to fund 86 of the 204 applications for mitigation assistance in FY 2004. These examples clearly indicate a need for enhanced SFA funding.

As you know, in 2001 the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, western governors, counties, state foresters and many stakeholders developed a ten-year collaborative strategy for reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health nationwide. The Strategy was updated by these partners in December, 2006 and calls for increasing collaboration between different levels of government and interest groups, improving fire prevention and suppression, reducing hazardous fuels, restoring ecosystems and promoting community assistance. These important goals are only achievable through substantial and sustained levels of funding for the State Fire Assistance Program.

In these fiscally constrained times, effective wildland fire management requires partnerships between agencies and communities. Funding hazardous fuels reduction on federal lands is critical, especially where these lands are in a WUI, and decisions about fuels reduction on federal lands needs to be done in conjunction with affected communities, including state and local agencies. An exclusive focus on federal lands, however, is an incomplete solution and will ultimately undermine mission success. State and private lands must be considered through a landscape-scale approach to planning and implementing hazardous fuels reduction projects if we are to effectively meet the highest priority of federal fire policy – protecting communities threatened by wildland fire.

The President's FY 2008 budget proposes cutting the U.S. Forest Service's budget by two percent and cutting 2,100 positions. Due to the reduced capability and size of the U.S. Forest Service, a viable State Fire Assistance Program is crucial to providing funding for necessary state and community wildfire protection. We appreciate your continued leadership and support for the State Fire Assistance Program and respectfully request that you consider increased funding for State Fire Assistance in FY 2008 in line with the needs outlined in the 10-Year Strategy.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters

American Forests

American Lands Alliance

Center for Biological Diversity

Colorado Counties Incorporated

Colorado Firecamp

Colorado Springs Utilities

Colorado Wild

Conservation Northwest

County Supervisors Association of Arizona

Denver Water

Environmental Protection Information Center

Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology

Forest Guardians

Forest Landowners Association

Forest Watch

Framing our Community

Gifford Pinchot Task Force

Idaho Conservation League

Idaho Association of Counties

International Association of Fire Chiefs

Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center

Montana Association of Counties

National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition

National Association of Counties

National Association of State Foresters

National Forestry Association

National Woodland Owners Association

Natural Resources Defense Council

Pitkin County, Colorado

Republicans for Environmental Protection

Society of American Foresters

Sustainable Northwest

The Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership Roundtable

The Lands Council

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees

The Nature Conservancy

The Wilderness Society

Umpqua Watersheds

Watershed Research and Training Center

Western Governors' Association

Wild South

WildWest Institute

cc: Senate Appropriations Committee members

March 27, 2007

The Honorable David Obey, Chairman
The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
United States House of Representatives Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Norman Dicks, Chairman,
The Honorable Todd Tiahrt, Ranking Member
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee
United States House of Representatives Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey, Ranking Member Lewis, Chairman Dicks and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

The respective organizations identified in this letter represent a coalition with the shared goal of improved state and community wildfire protection. The State Fire Assistance Program (SFA), as funded through State and Private Forestry and Wildland Fire Management under the USDA Forest Service, provides critical cost sharing to state forestry agencies that helps to facilitate successful wildland fire preparedness and management by integrating state and private lands into landscape-scale fuel mitigation and planning.

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