

Combat Catastrophic Wildfires Ravaging the Nation
Deadline COB Wednesday, October 4th

Dear Colleague:

This wildfire season has been one of the worst on record. The National Interagency Fire Center reports that there have been 49,563 fires that burned 8,422,251 acres so far in 2017. The U.S. Forest Service has already spent more than \$2.3 billion on suppression costs this fiscal year alone - a new record.

Mismanagement has left our forests vulnerable to insects and disease and ripe for catastrophic wildfires. The system is broken. We need forest management reforms, and we need them now.

The letter asks Director Mulvaney to treat catastrophic wildfires like other natural disasters and work with Congress to help us fix the way we manage our forests so that we're curbing the cost and destruction of these fires rather than remaining in this endless wildfire nationwide cycle.

The full letter is below. If you have questions or to sign on, please email Chris Huckleberry in Congressman Schrader's office at huck@mail.house.gov, Cody Burkham in Congressman Westerman's office at cody.burkham@mail.house.gov or Western Caucus Executive Director Jeff Small at jeff.small@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

Greg Walden
Member of Congress

Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress

Scott Tipton
Member of Congress

Greg Gianforte
Member of Congress

Paul A. Gosar
Member of Congress

Mike Simpson
Member of Congress

Tom McClintock
Member of Congress

October _____, 2017

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
The Office of Management & Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Mulvaney:

We write to call your immediate attention to the damage catastrophic wildfires cause to our communities, States, national forests and other public lands throughout the country.

The National Interagency Fire Center reports that there have been 49,563 fires that burned 8,422,251 acres so far in 2017. According to the U.S. Forest Service (FS), another 80 million acres throughout the country are currently considered high risk. The FS has expended more than \$2.3 billion to fight fires in fiscal year 2017 alone - a new record. The House Committee on Natural Resources reports that in 2016, wildfires destroyed 4,312 structures, including 3,192 residences.

The House Committee on Natural Resources also stated, “Despite [data](#) from the FS indicating that active forest management reduces wildfire intensity and improves forest health, only 1 to 2% of high risk areas are treated.” In fact, the Committee has reported that hazardous fuels are accumulating three times as fast as they can be treated and that the FS only harvested 2.5 billion board feet in 2016 compared to over 10 billion board feet in 1990. To make matters worse, litigation and other challenges have caused a significant reduction in active saw mills nationwide, from 1,311 in 1995 to just over 220 today.

Catastrophic fires also cause significant damage to the environment. Robust data from NASA has concluded that one catastrophic wildfire can emit more carbon emissions in a few days than total vehicle emissions in an entire state over the course of a year. As a result of recent wildfires, Seeley Lake, Montana set a record for the worst air quality ever recorded there - 18 times greater than EPA’s safe particle limit. The House Committee on Energy and Commerce recently reported, “In 2005 alone, wildfires resulted in more than 126 million tons of carbon dioxide in the United States.”

Rep. Westerman and Ken Fisher [recently pointed out](#) that Congress authorized approximately \$120 billion for Hurricane Katrina and \$50 billion for Hurricane Sandy relief. Meanwhile, the entire [2016 budget](#) for the Forest Service was \$7.1 billion. More than half of these funds went to put out wildfires. Catastrophic wildfires are horrific disasters and should be responded to as such – much the same way that we as a nation are currently confronting the incredible devastation wrought by Hurricanes Maria, Harvey and Irma.

Eight times in the last twelve years, the FS has moved funds from other operating accounts to fight fire, depleting accounts for forest management in the process that would help prevent catastrophic wildfires. This flawed approach causes us to spend billions of dollars on the backend to suppress fire, neglecting fire prevention and putting our communities at increasing risk of catastrophic fire. This is a treatable problem, and one which we understand the causes of very well.

Healthy forest advocates support solutions like Rep. Westerman’s bipartisan H.R. 2936, Resilient Federal Forests Act and Reps. Simpson and Schrader’s bipartisan H.R. 2862, the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. H.R. 2936 is comprehensive legislation that simplifies the cumbersome planning process and reduces the cost of implementing proactive forest

management strategies. The bill adopts a forward-thinking, active management strategy that combats dangerous wildfires before they get started and includes reforms that would end the practice of fire borrowing. H.R. 2862 would change how we budget for the costs of suppressing catastrophic wildfires to conform to the method we use to budget for other natural disasters, such as hurricanes and tornados. This reform seeks to ensure resources are available to fight catastrophic wildfires without raiding accounts that prevent these fires in the first place.

Mismanagement has left our forests vulnerable to insects and disease and ripe for catastrophic wildfires. The system is broken. We need forest management reforms, and we need them now. We ask that you work with us to help to fix the way we manage our forests and how we pay for wildfire disasters. Two goals we can all agree on are reducing the costs of these fires and breaking out of this destructive, nationwide wildfire cycle.

Accordingly, we ask that the Administration send Congress a proposal that includes comprehensive forest management and wildland fire budgeting reforms as part of the next disaster relief request as soon as possible. We look forward to working with you to resolve these long-standing issues for the benefit of the American people and to ensure our natural resource heritage is sustained for future generations.

Sincerely,

Cc: Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue
Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke
U.S. Forest Service Chief Tony Tooke
Speaker of the House Paul Ryan
Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy
Majority Whip Steve Scalise