

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage
Conservation Council*

June 27, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20250

Re: Wildfire Disaster Funding Act

Dear Secretary Jewell and Secretary Vilsack,

The Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (WHHCC) met on June 17 and 18, 2014. Among other important topics, we discussed the ongoing significant diversion of your agencies' funds to fight increasing numbers of catastrophic forest fires at the expense of and detriment to other important agency programs, including projects and activities that would actually reduce the incidence of such expensive fires. Under Secretary Robert Bonnie from the Department of Agriculture (USDA) also joined our meeting and expressed this same concern. As your federal advisory committee on the future of wildlife conservation and hunting in America, we are writing to urge your active support for the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFFA), S 1875 and H.R. 3992, in the Interior Appropriations bill.

As you are likely aware, each year necessary funding for programs that address recreation and wildlife habitat management on our federal public lands is transferred to other accounts to pay for unavoidable wildfire suppression costs. Even when these programs are repaid, the delay in repayment is often many months and the effectiveness of ongoing program activities is severely impacted. By providing a "budget cap adjustment," WDFFA addresses these recurring problems by funding a portion of the USDA Forest Service and Department of Interior (DOI) wildfire suppression costs in a manner similar to the funding method currently used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

Like you, the WHHCC is concerned that the cost of longer, more severe wildfire seasons will continue to impact the flow of funds to other USDA and DOI programs, especially the very programs and projects that could reduce the threat of catastrophic fires. We note, for example, that records indicate Forest Service wildfire management costs were 13% of the agency's budget in 1991 and that after the last several fire seasons those same costs are now 50% of the Forest Service's overall budget. Passage of WDFFA would not only stabilize funding for non-fire programs in your agencies, it would reduce the year-to-year uncertainty of such funding and allow your agencies to pursue more productive forest health, fire prevention, and climate change adaptation projects.

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DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICER &
COORDINATOR

Joshua Winchell
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS EA-3103
Arlington, VA 22203
P 703 358-2639
F 703 358-2548

As long as circumstances like drought and heavy fuel loads conspire to create longer more intense and costly wildfire seasons, the practice of transferring funds from habitat management, outdoor recreation and other programs to pay for emergency fire response will continue. We, therefore, respectfully urge you to include and actively support the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act in the Interior Appropriations bill. Should you have any questions or need for additional information about this issue, please let us know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Tomke". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

John Tomke, Chair
Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council