

March 19, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-128, Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-146A, Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Chairwoman  
House Appropriations Committee  
H-307, Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Committee  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Shelby, Senator Leahy, Congresswoman Lowey, and Congresswoman Granger:

Bipartisan & bicameral efforts in the 115th Congress finally succeeded in fixing the problem of fire-borrowing at the US Forest Service (USFS). Signed into law in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, this landmark change to fire suppression funding requires the leadership of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress to ensure the USFS can allocate full funding to its other vital programs beginning in FY20.

Truly solving the problems with Forest Service budgeting is a two-step process. The first step was the recent fix that ended the reallocation of funds from vital USFS programs across the country to pay for the escalating costs of fire suppression, a practice long known as fire-borrowing. The depletion of Forest Service budgets through fire borrowing drove a 39% decrease in staff positions that work to manage National Forest System lands from 1998-2015. From 2001-2015, the Forest Service program budget for Vegetation and Watershed Management declined 24%, Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management declined 18%, and Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness declined 15%. These impacts drove a broad coalition of hunting, conservation, and outdoor recreation organizations and advocates to press for action on this issue – a call finally answered by the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. As a result, these costs will no longer continue to consume a disproportionate share of the Forest Service budget.

Now, Congress must take the second step to ensure that the funds made available by stabilizing the agency budget against rising firefighting costs are reinvested back into the Forest Service mission, with a special emphasis on forest health, recreation, and access. To lose these newly flexible dollars to other spending priorities unrelated to the improvement of our forest management would mean a failure to achieve a comprehensive fire funding solution.

Outdoor recreation alone is an \$887B industry that relies on the proper management of America's public lands. The Forest Service mission has been burdened with the increasing cost of fire suppression for years; Congress took a wise step by changing the way we fund fire suppression, now by investing the savings from the fire fix back in to the Forest Service budget, Congress can take the second step, toward more productive national forests and grasslands.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our public lands, including those administered by the USFS, are fully funded and properly managed for generations of Americans to enjoy.

Sincerely,

- American Fisheries Society
- American Fly Fishing Trade Association
- American Woodcock Society
- Angler Action Foundation
- Archery Trade Association
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
- Camp Fire Club of America
- Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
- Conservation Force
- Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
- Delta Waterfowl
- Houston Safari Club
- Izaak Walton League of America
- Mule Deer Foundation
- National Association of Forest Service Retirees
- National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
- National Deer Alliance
- National Wildlife Federation
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Outdoor Industry Association
- Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
- Pheasants Forever
- Pope and Young Club
- Quail Forever
- Quality Deer Management Association
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Ruffed Grouse Society

- The Nature Conservancy
- Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
- Tread Lightly
- Trout Unlimited
- Whitetails Unlimited
- Wildlife Management Institute