



April 23, 2014

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The Honorable Barbara Boxer
112 Hart Senate Office Building
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Dear Senator Boxer:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), I am writing to urge you to cosponsor the *Wildfire Disaster Funding Act* (S 1875). As you may be aware, this bipartisan legislation would allow the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to access emergency funding to cover suppression of large forest fires without undermining other valuable programs such as hazardous fuels reduction and timber management.

For years, USFS and DOI have had to transfer funds away from vital programs and services in order to fund emergency wildfire suppression activities. Longer fire seasons, increased development in the wildland-urban interface, and millions of acres of forests with fuel loads exceeding the historic range of variability are among the many factors contributing to the repeated need to transfer funds from non-fire programs to pay for wildfire suppression. Incidentally, this practice has negatively affected a number of land management programs, including those aimed at decreasing long-term wildfire risk and costs.

S 1875 offers a promising approach to managing emergency wildfire suppression costs for "mega-fires" without impacting other priority programs. Under the legislation, a portion of USFS and DOI wildfire suppression costs would be funded through a budget cap adjustment that would allow the agencies to access emergency funding through the disaster cap utilized by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for other major natural disasters. This would eliminate the need to transfer dollars from other accounts when fire suppression funds run out. Currently, USFS and DOI are the only agencies required to pay for natural disaster response out of their annual discretionary budgets.

It should be noted that S 1875 would not revise federal fire suppression policies or strategies and would not change the cost of fire suppression; accordingly, the bill would have a neutral impact on federal spending and the federal budget deficit. At the same time, the legislation would provide a reliable funding structure - consistent with that used by other agencies responding to natural disaster emergencies - thus enabling USFS and DOI to meet their land management and emergency response objectives.

Again, I strongly urge you to cosponsor the *Wildfire Disaster Funding Act*. If you have any questions or if you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew Z. Cate". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Matt Cate
CSAC Executive Director