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Forest Service Partners

As many of you know, the Forest Service is in the midst of a challenging firefighting year which is affecting all of our natural resource and public services programs. In Fiscal Year 2008, there have been two massive fire events in California (Santa Ana's last fall and widespread lightning in June), each with a high demand for firefighting resources. This demand has been met by the Forest Service, state and local fire departments, U.S. Department of the Interior, the military, and international help.

We have depleted the \$1.18 billion allocated in our FY 2008 budget for fire suppression, but we will continue to fight wildfires through late summer and fall. To make additional funding available for firefighting, the Forest Service has set in motion its legislated transfer authority to recall funding from non-fire programs. In response to your inquiries, I am providing you an overview of our current situation with fire funding and some of the impacts resulting from it. We are monitoring firefighting needs and expenditures daily and will inform you of any changes.

The Forest Service is committed to fighting wildfire safely and effectively through close cooperation with communities, states, and other federal agencies. We are dedicated to examining all possible solutions to the situation we face this fire season and in the coming year. We deeply regret the impacts this funding transfer is having on you and the projects and activities you have been committed to completing with us. The Forest Service values our relationships with all of our partners and the contributions you make to serve people and care for the lands and waters important to us all. We ask that you persevere with us during this challenging time and encourage you to work with your agency contacts if you have questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sally D. Collins
ABIGAIL R. KIMBELL
Chief

Attachment



Impacts of 2007-2008 Forest Service Firefighting Activities and Funding Fire Suppression

Forest Service funding for fire suppression is based on the current ten-year average of fire expenditures, adjusted for inflation. Funds are requested annually. At times, the Forest Service has received additional funding for fire suppression through emergency supplemental appropriations. In fact, the Forest Service received \$332 million in emergency supplemental funding for FY-2008 in October and November of 2007, but all of this funding has been used in firefighting efforts.

The Forest Service has taken measures to ensure cost efficiency in fighting wildfire and in protecting life and property. However, firefighting activity and costs have risen steadily and drastically over the past several years due to the increased need and costs of protecting homes built near natural areas, drought and climate change.

The rising cost of fires means the ten-year average is rising dramatically. The funds to cover this ten-year average must be identified within the total funding available to the agency when it makes its annual budget request. To meet firefighting funding needs, all other Forest Service activities have experienced a steady decline in funding.

The situation this year is significantly different. The Forest Service has been able to use Transfer Authority in the past, including in 2006 and 2007. However, in 2008, most of the large balances in trust funds have been depleted to the point that they can no longer provide the emergency funding needed. Therefore, the Forest Service has had to reach deep into other accounts to avoid running out of funds to cover fire suppression. Thus, to meet our firefighting mandate, the Forest Service has initiated a recall of \$400 MM from agency programs throughout the nation.

Many of our partners and stakeholders are directly impacted. On some activities, we have not been able to fulfill our commitments to get important work done. These impacts include:

- Rescinding or delaying some grants and agreements and canceling some contract awards made to stakeholder groups, non-profits, communities and States, resulting in programs not delivered to citizens and loss of jobs; and
- Canceling and delaying over 150 grants and agreements with universities, and postponing the hiring of graduate students and researchers who assist with priority Forest Service research, including impacts to the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program;
- Delaying data collection for on-going research and project analyses scheduled for this specific time of year, thus affecting project deadlines and targets into the next year;
- Discontinuing work on many construction, research and natural resource improvement projects including watershed restoration, water quality and habitat improvement, thinning to reduce fire risk, and evaluating oil, gas and other energy requests;
- Discontinuing planning for projects to be implemented next year;
- Discontinuing most employee travel, training, and other non-salary costs to employees.