

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED
 Agencies Appropriations, Act 2009 - DIVISION E
 House Appropriations Committee Print
 Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009
 H.R. 1105; Public Law 111-8
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1150
 WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT
 (INCLUDING TRANSFERS OF FUNDS)

Appropriation enacted, 2008.....	\$1,943,477,000
Budget estimate.....	1,976,592,000
Bill, 2009.....	2,131,630,000
Comparisons:	
Appropriations, 2008.....	+188,153,000
Budget estimate, 2009.....	+155,038,000

The detailed allocation of funding by program, activity and subactivity is included in the table at the end of this section of the statement. In addition, the bill also includes the following specific funding levels and directions:

Preparedness.--The bill provides the fiscal year 2008 funding level, plus \$6,181,000 for fixed costs, plus \$3,000,000 to continue the firefighter retention initiative funded through P.L. 110-329. The Forest Service should maintain the levels of readiness needed for public safety that were established in fiscal year 2007. The Forest Service should analyze current readiness levels to determine whether maintaining preparedness resources in the field at a level not less than that established in fiscal year 2007 will, based on the best information available, result in lower overall firefighting costs. If the Forest Service makes such a determination, the Service should adjust the levels for preparedness and suppression funding accordingly and report on these adjustments to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. The Secretary of Agriculture should advise the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations in writing prior to the decision. In the future, the Committees on Appropriations expect the Service to request preparedness budgets that adequately cover the costs of readiness activities without undue shifts of expenses to the suppression appropriation.

The Committees are very concerned that the Service has not yet finalized or implemented a comprehensive plan to improve firefighter recruitment and retention in Region 5, despite documented vacancies in firefighting positions. The Committees understand that the Service is still studying a range of options to improve firefighter recruitment and retention in Region 5 and other high-risk areas of the nation, including changes to pay rates and scheduling flexibility. Further delay is not acceptable. The Service is directed to provide a comprehensive recruitment and retention plan, including a full spending plan for the funds appropriated in P.L. 110-329, to the Committees by no later than March 1, 2009.

Fire suppression operations.--The bill provides the request, \$993,947,000, for fire operations, an increase of \$148,327,000 above the fiscal year 2008 non-emergency funding level. The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior should continue reports required previously and examine, using independent panels, any individual wildfire incident which results in expenses greater than \$10,000,000.

Hazardous Fuels.--The bill provides \$328,086,000 for the hazardous fuels reduction program, an increase of \$18,000,000 above the fiscal year 2008 level. This funding increase should be used in those areas facing the greatest risk from wildfires because of excessive fuel loads.