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.