

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 30, 2021

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce,

As members of the Bipartisan Wildfire Caucus, we write asking that you provide robust funding to programs in the Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill that will support improved wildfire preparedness, mitigation, and response across the United States.

2020 was a historic wildfire year. The National Interagency Fire Center reported that U.S. wildfires burned 10.27 million acres as of December 31, 2020 - the highest yearly total since accurate records began in 1983. Colorado experienced the three largest wildfires in state history. In California alone, nearly 4.2 million acres burned, more than double the previous record.

U.S. wildfire damages in 2020 totaled \$16.5 billion, ranking it as the third-costliest year on record. Three separate fires in California and one in Oregon generated over \$1 billion in losses. 12 additional fires in California, Oregon, Colorado, and Washington each caused over \$100 million in direct losses. The direct damages from Oregon's Beachie Creek Fire alone totaled \$1.6 billion, making it Oregon's costliest fire on record.

In addition to the widespread economic toll of these fires, the direct death toll from the 2020 wildfire season is at least 43. According to research from Stanford University¹, the indirect death toll due to inhalation of wildfire smoke is estimated to be in the thousands. Authors of the study estimate that wildfire smoke likely is responsible for 5,000 to 15,000 deaths in an average year in the U.S.

Such a historic challenge requires a proportionate response. We implore you to provide robust funding to programs that help address the many wildfire preparedness, response, and recovery

¹ <https://siepr.stanford.edu/research/publications/managing-growing-cost-wildfire>

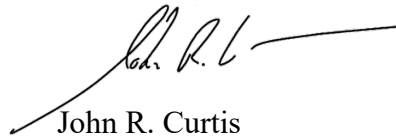
challenges our nation faces today. This includes the urgent need to increase the pace and scale of hazardous fuels management and forest restoration; improve ecosystem health; reduce the risk of severe flooding and erosion in forests after fire; protect critical watersheds; and bolster support for the wildland firefighting workforce. We encourage the committee to consider both the short- and long-term causes of wildfire and to fund programs that support forest health – including investments in research being done at federal laboratories and research institutions across the country to ensure that the best available science is used in wildfire mitigation, response, and recovery, is a priority.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



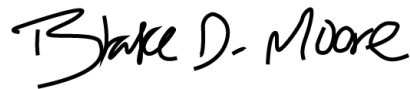
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Member of Congress



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