

April 7, 2008

The Honorable Nick Rahall
U.S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rahall,

The undersigned organizations are writing to express support for H.R. 5541, the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act. By establishing a new federal fund to be used only for suppression of catastrophic emergency wildland fires, this bill will help to move land management agencies towards a sustainable suppression funding mechanism better suited to deal with the escalating costs of fighting truly catastrophic fires.

The cost of suppressing fires has grown enormously in recent years and projections indicate that this trend will only increase as a result of hazardous fuels build-up, climate change, and increasingly populated wildland-urban interface areas. For example, the US Forest Service (USFS) has spent over \$1 billion per year in five of the last seven years to extinguish fires. Wildland fire management activities (the largest component of which is suppression) rose from 13 percent of the agency's budget in fiscal year 1991 to a staggering 48 percent projected for fiscal year 2009.

These escalating costs have had a significant impact on the USFS and Department of the Interior (DOI), which are charged with wildland fire protection. Due to their budgets remaining essentially flat or declining from year-to-year, these agencies have consistently drained their other core programs in order to sufficiently fund fire suppression at the required 10-year rolling average level. Even with the diversion of funds, the agencies are regularly compelled to request supplemental funding from Congress each fire season and are forced to transfer already limited dollars from other essential agency programs. Such transfers further reduce program budgets and lead to program disruptions, project cancellations, and strained relationships with partners.

The emergency fund created by the proposed FLAME Act will reduce the need to deplete other agency programs to pay for suppression and will provide more assured funding than uncertain year-to-year emergency supplementals. We are pleased to see Congress requiring a high level of accountability via the reporting requirements listed in the bill, ensuring that this fund will *not* become a 'blank check' for the agency, but rather a key mechanism for isolating the costs of those largest, most catastrophic of fires that wreak havoc on agency budgets year after year.

We greatly appreciate the leadership that you have demonstrated in developing this legislation. The FLAME Act is an important first step in addressing the escalating costs of catastrophic wildland fires. We also recognize the efforts of the Agriculture Committee to work towards finding solutions for this grave problem. We look forward to providing any assistance that may be useful as you work to pass this important legislation in a bipartisan manner to address the long-term wildfire suppression funding situation.

Sincerely,

American Forests
American Lands Alliance
American Whitewater
Center for Biological Diversity
Clearwater Resource Council
Defenders of Wildlife
Forest Energy Corp
The Forest Service Council of the National Federation of Federal Employees
Framing our Community
Future Forest, LLC
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Lake Country Resources Initiative
National Association of Counties
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Federation of Federal Employees
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Northwest Connections
Olympic Forest Coalition
Outdoor Alliance
Outdoor Association
Outdoor Industry Association
Pacific Rivers Council
Salmon Valley Stewardship
Sierra Club
Sierra Forest Legacy
Sierra Institute for Community and Environment
The Siuslaw Institute, Inc.
Sustainable Northwest
Swan Ecosystem Center
Wallowa Resources
Watershed Research & Training Center
Western Governors Association
The Wilderness Society
WildWest Institute
The Yaak Valley Forest Council

c.c.

The Honorable Thomas H. Allen
The Honorable Joe Baca
The Honorable Brian Baird
The Honorable Rob Bishop
The Honorable Mary Bono Mack
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
The Honorable Lois Capps
The Honorable Ben Chandler
The Honorable Donna M. Christensen

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
The Honorable Norman D. Dicks
The Honorable John D. Dingell
The Honorable Wayne Gilchrest
The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
The Honorable Maurice Hinchey
The Honorable Jesse Jackson, Jr.
The Honorable James P. Moran
The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano
The Honorable Collin Peterson
The Honorable John T. Salazar
The Honorable William T. Sali
The Honorable John Sarbanes
The Honorable Heath Shuler
The Honorable Mike Thompson
The Honorable Todd Tiarht
The Honorable Mark Udall
The Honorable Tom Udall
The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
The Honorable Don Young