



May 1, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Room 6156  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Janet Napolitano  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary(s) Salazar, Vilsack and Napolitano:

On behalf of the National Association of Counties, the Western Governors' Association and the National Association of State Foresters, we urge you to support continuation of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WiFLC or Council).

The wildland fire problem is national in scope with impacts on every area of the country. It cannot be solved locally or regionally. Rather, it requires support by the Administration, along with partnerships among federal, state and local fire organizations – and individuals. We need to set the stage for developing a framework of principles, strategic direction, and selected roles and responsibilities for federal, state, tribal, and local agencies that will help us better manage and live with wildland fire as a nation.

The Council provides strategic oversight to ensure policy coordination, accountability, and effective implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and related long-term strategies to address wildfire suppression, assistance to communities, hazardous fuels reduction, habitat restoration, and rehabilitation of the Nation's forests and rangelands.

The Council was established in April 2002 by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior as an intergovernmental committee of federal, state, tribal, county, and municipal government officials, dedicated to consistent implementation of wildland fire policies, goals, and management activities. In addition to the federal officials, the Council includes five (5) members who are elected officers (or designees) of tribal, state, county, and municipal governments. Input from other interested stakeholders and non-governmental organizations also provides important insights, which have led to successful outcomes on the ground. The WiFLC has welcomed this very valuable perspective in the past and it is critical that it continue to occur on a regular basis.

Membership on the Council includes the following Federal officials or their designated representatives:

USDA:

- Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment
- Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment
- Chief of the Forest Service

DOI:

- Assistant Secretary for Policy Management and Budget
- Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management
- Directors of the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Geological Survey

DHS:

- Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency

A cohesive and collaborative leadership team is needed now, more than ever, and during this time of transition. It is important to provide the necessary support from WiFLC agencies to address cooperative fire management concerns, such as cost responsibilities in the Wildland Urban Interface. In addition, continued implementation of the 10 Year Strategy will depend upon continued support from the WiFLC members. This strategy addresses the goals of the National Fire Plan, while recognizing the benefits of a collaborative outcome versus the traditional individual agency-specific policy implementation.

One example of a successful, collaborative-lead outcome is the completion of the “Community Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.” This new resource guide to help communities at risk from wildfire was collaboratively developed by over twelve agencies and organizations. Developing this guidance accomplished three 10 Year Strategy-Implementation Plan tasks and is being used across the nation to help mitigate the risks of wildfire. We are committed to continuing our efforts in meeting the goals of the National Fire Plan together.

We urge you to continue to support this valuable intergovernmental council. The time to act is now as the wildland fire season is upon us. The Council representatives from states and counties stand ready to continue our work with our federal partners towards the implementation of wildland fire policies, goals, and management activities.

Sincerely,

Pam Inmann  
Executive Director  
Western Governors’ Association

Larry Naake  
Executive Director  
National Association of Counties

Jay Farrell  
Executive Director  
National Association of State Foresters