



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Dirk Kempthorne
Governor of Idaho
Chairman

James M. Souby
Executive Director

September 21, 2000

The Honorable Slade Gorton
The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ralph Regula
The Honorable Norm Dicks
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Gorton and Byrd and Congressmen Regula and Dicks:

The Western Governors' Association met with Secretaries Babbitt and Glickman on September 16, 2000, in Salt Lake City regarding the Administration's \$1.6 billion emergency budget request and the Secretaries' Report to the President in response to the wildfires of 2000. As a result of this meeting, a mutual agreement was made to support the \$1.6 billion proposal by the Administration and also to create a new federal-state collaborative stewardship structure to address the long-term issues of wildland fire response and forest health.

Over the last few days, Western Governors have worked to create a document which memorializes the agreement reached. Representatives of the Secretaries were consulted during the process, however, full agreement was not reached due to time constraints.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of this proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact us or our colleagues if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dirk Kempthorne
Chairman
State of Idaho

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.
Lead Governor
State of Oregon

Marc Racicot
Lead Governor
State of Montana

cc: Senator Trent Lott
Senator Tom Daschle
Speaker Dennis Hastert
Minority Leader Richard Gebhardt
Secretary Dan Glickman
Secretary Bruce Babbitt
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PROPOSED INTERIOR APPROPRIATIONS REPORT LANGUAGE OF THE WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION REGARDING EMERGENCY FIRE RECOVERY FUNDS

The Governors support the actions included within the Secretaries' Report to the President in response to the wildfires of 2000 provided three items are incorporated: that the affected States' governors, Tribes, and local communities are full partners in the planning, analysis, decision making, and implementation of the proposal; that a long-term strategy for reducing wildfire risks be developed and be applied to state, federal, Tribal, and private lands where the landowners are willing; and, that any additional funds necessary to address those lands and other immediate equipment needs and reimbursements from the current fire season are incorporated.

1. Within the emergency appropriation for restoration/forest health, add the following conference report language:

"The Western Governors' Association met with the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior regarding the Administration's \$1.6 billion emergency budget request and the Secretaries' Report to the President in response to the wildfires of 2000. As a result of this meeting, a mutual agreement was made to support the \$1.6 billion proposal by the Administration and also to create a new federal-state collaborative stewardship structure to address the long-term issues of resource restoration, wildfire risk reduction, fire response and forest health.

The Conferees concur with the affected States, Tribes, and local communities being full partners in implementing the Secretaries' Fire Report including planning, analysis, and implementation of science-based fuels treatment, other fire-risk reduction strategies, and restoration of fire damaged-landscapes.

The Conferees also concur with the establishment of the federal-state collaborative structure. The Conferees direct the USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior to implement this long term strategy based on the following principles:

Within six months the federal-state collaborative structure must develop a national ten year comprehensive strategy with the states as full partners in the planning, decision making, and implementation of the plan.

Then at the appropriate level, States, Tribes, and local communities are also full partners in the local planning, development, and implementation of this strategy developed through the collaborative approach.

This strategy shall be developed on a landscape basis on federal lands, which are susceptible to wildfire risks and state, tribal, and private lands which are commingled with or in proximity to those federal lands.

Planning for and implementation of this strategy should include local interests.

Among the items to be developed in this long-term strategy will be contracting procedures which focus on restoration, forest health, and rangeland activities recommended by land managers.

This strategy shall include the development of procedures, within existing laws, to expedite compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and interagency consultation required by the Endangered Species Act.

This strategy for the restoration of forests, streams and watersheds shall use the best science available. Comprehensive, scientific analyses such as watershed assessments help identify the appropriate treatments and level of activity. These are also useful for strategically focusing scarce human and financial resources.

Restoration activities may include prescribed fire, riparian restoration, road maintenance and management, noxious weed treatments and understory thinning.

The strategy shall consider a full range of resource objectives, and adhere to existing laws and regulatory requirements.

The strategy must include yearly performance goals, objectives, budget estimates, and time lines to implement the strategy within the ten-year time frame.

The strategy shall include yearly reports to the President, the House and Senate Appropriations Committee, the authorization committees, the governors of the states encompassed within the plan documenting the nature and extent of treatments (including acreages and types of activities) by the land management agencies.”

2. Within the emergency appropriation for fire fighting preparedness, add the following conference report language:

"In review of the 2000 fire season, it has been identified by the Western Governors' Association, in consultation with the secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, that a comprehensive review of fire fighting

regulations, policy and operating procedures needs to be completed. This review must include all the federal and state agencies who are active partners in our nation's fire fighting organization.

The federal-state collaborative structure is therefore directed to identify barriers to more effective fire fighting and fire preparedness and report back to the President, the Congress and the governors as soon as practicable but no later than 1 year. Potential barriers that should be discussed include insufficient training for fire supervisors and fire fighters at all levels including military personnel and differences in fire fighting policies and procedures which can cause delay and confusion.”

Attachments:

Budget Issues: Emergency Contingency Request for Fire

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The Western Governors are concerned that local response capability is often overwhelmed by wildland-urban interface firefighting complexity. These first responders are vital to protecting life and property. Local fire agencies provide initial attack on over 90 percent of the wildfires.

The Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000 addresses this issue. The Western governors support the cooperative fire protection program in the plan and further recommend consideration of:

- An increase in Volunteer Fire Assistance from \$13.3 to \$35 million to assist fire departments in adjusting equipment and training to safely fight interface fire.
- Increase State Fire Assistance from \$49 to \$75 million focused on providing assistance to state suppression capabilities in fire-prone areas, and incorporate prevention efforts into all communities at risk.
- Provide mitigation and fuels management to reduce hazards through cost-share incentives focused in areas of highest risk from \$20 to \$35 million.