



Funding Fire Management on the Fiscal Front Burner

After years of phony budgeting and chronic underfunding, it looks like Congress and the Obama Administration are determined to create an honest budgeting system that provides increased funds for hazardous fuels reduction and wildfire management.

First, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act ([PL 111-5](#), a.k.a. the "Stimulus Bill") that passed on February 17, 2009 will provide \$515 million for hazardous fuels reduction projects on both federal lands and State/private lands. The intent of Congress and the Obama Administration is to quickly boost jobs primarily among non-federal workers, so fuels projects must be "chainsaw / driptorch ready" (meaning that any environmental analysis required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has already been completed) to begin hiring workers immediately.



No doubt that fuels reduction work could use some hefty funding and lots of more labor, but it is vital that projects be strategically located and focused on improving community preparation and fire management "infrastructure" needed for managing large-scale prescribed fire and wildland fire use. **In consort with taxpayer and conservation watchdog groups, FUSEE will monitor the use of the new fuels reduction funds to see that taxpayers and fire management workers are getting the best bang for these big bucks.**

The week after the Stimulus Bill passed, President Obama released his [proposed budget](#) for FY2010 Appropriations that seeks up to \$1.1 billion for wildfire suppression. Additionally, the Administration proposes to create a special discretionary contingent reserve of \$282 million for the U.S. Forest Service and \$75 million for Department of Interior agencies that they can spend on large wildfire suppression after the normal appropriated funds are exhausted.

Because the former Congress and Bush Administration never provided realistic budgets for wildfire suppression, the Forest Service was annually raiding the accounts of non-fire resource management programs and going to Congress for emergency supplemental appropriations when appropriated funds ran out. The proposed huge increase in appropriations and the special reserve funds dedicated to wildfire suppression are intended to prevent the agencies from continuing to raid the accounts of other essential resource management programs - including the hazardous fuels reduction fund.

The creation of honest budgeting and a dedicated reserve fund for wildfire suppression fulfills a [promise](#) issued last Fall by the Obama-Biden campaign. It also responds to last year's FLAME Act, which passed the House but died in the Senate, that attempted to create a special fund for "emergency catastrophic wildfire suppression." (See [FUSEE's letter](#) to Congress on the FLAME Act.)

The "Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions," a coalition that includes FUSEE and a wide diversity of groups ranging from the American Lands Alliance to the American Forest and Paper Association, also endorses the concept of a separate account for wildfire suppression that insulates non-fire programs from

suppression "borrowing." This coalition is also proposing a new budgeting model be developed to replace the current flawed system of using the 10-year rolling average to determine funding levels. This is necessary given that climate change, invasive weeds, suburban sprawl and other factors are causing wildfires to burn larger and longer, fire seasons to lengthen and subsequent fire management costs to increase into the foreseeable future.

FUSEE will continue working on behalf of our members to provide information and policy advice to Administration officials and Congressional committees working on the FY2010 Appropriations Bill and other fire-related legislation. We will be persuading policymakers to stop thinking narrowly in terms of funding emergency wildfire suppression, and instead, get them to look more broadly at funding needed to effectively implement the emerging policy of Strategic Management Response, a.k.a. fire *management*. This means proactively investing in the kind of fire management plans, community preparation projects, and firefighter training needed to greatly expand wildfire monitoring, fire use tactics, and point-protection strategies.

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FUSEE supports a growing network of progressive fire professionals who envision a new fire management paradigm that interconnects firefighter safety with professional ethics and ecological restoration.



We strive to provide a safe forum and a collective voice for public and private sector fire management professionals to educate the public, policymakers, and the press about the challenges facing fire management today.

If you would like more information about FUSEE, don't hesitate to [contact us](#) or visit our [website](#). We look forward to hearing from you.

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