

Firefighters' Group Releases New Report on the Most Expensive Wildfire Suppression Incident In U.S. History

The Soberanes Fire Suppression Siege Demonstrates the Need for Fiscal Restraint and Accountability in Forest Service Backcountry Firefighting

For Immediate Release: December 5th, 2018

Contact: Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph. D. FUSEE efn@fire.org (541) 338-7671

EUGENE, OR – Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE) released a report, *The Sky's the Limit: The Soberanes Fire Suppression Siege of 2016*, on Wednesday, December 5, 2018 analyzing the record-breaking suppression spending on the 2016 Soberanes Fire in the Los Padres National Forest in California. **The U.S. Forest Service spent an unprecedented \$262 million, averaging several million dollars per day, fighting a backcountry fire that burned mostly in the Ventana Wilderness Area.**

“The Soberanes Fire Suppression Siege offers an extreme example of excessive, unaccountable, budget-busting suppression spending that is causing a fiscal crisis in the U.S. Forest Service,” writes Dr. Timothy Ingalsbee, Executive Director of FUSEE. “It demonstrates the absolute necessity for Congress to perform critical oversight of wildfire suppression spending by federal agencies.”

The 28 page report is one of the first efforts to use cost data derived from the Forest Service’s new “e-Isuite” Database that tracks daily costs of each suppression resource, and results are presented in a series of graphs. The report also features several maps and photos of the Soberanes Fire suppression operations.

The report critically examines the Forest Service’s decision-making rationale, in which **fire managers spent tens of millions of dollars applying ineffective suppression operations long after the wildfire had moved away from populated areas and the risk of homes burning had largely ceased.**

Summary Points:

- The Forest Service spent a record \$262 million fighting the Soberanes Fire, which burned mostly in the Ventana Wilderness Area.
- Fire managers failed to do proper risk assessments of the costs and benefits of suppression strategy and tactics as the location and conditions of the Soberanes Fire changed over its three month duration.
- Federal fire managers must shift priorities from fighting fires in backcountry wildlands to protecting homes and preparing frontcountry communities for prescribed and wildland fire.
- As Congress debates funding levels in its Fiscal Year 2019 Omnibus Spending Bill, policymakers must demand fiscal restraint and accountability for Forest Service suppression spending.

“The endless and escalating ‘war’ on wildfire makes no distinctions between rural communities and remote wildlands. **While homes are getting burned from lack of suppression resources in the frontcountry, taxpayers are getting burned from firefighting boondoggles in the backcountry**, said Timothy Ingalsbee, lead author of the Soberanes Fire report. “We must become more strategic and selective in our use of expensive suppression resources, making community protection our highest priority, and stop wasting taxpayer dollars on futile backcountry firefighting actions whose main justification is to look good on the nightly news.”

The full report is available for download at <http://www.fusee.org/fusee-publications/>

For More Information Contact: Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph. D. FUSEE efn@fire.org (541)-338-7671

###

[FUSEE](#) is a nonprofit organization that conducts public education and policy advocacy promoting safe, ethical, ecological wildland fire management. FUSEE members include current and former wildland firefighters, fire managers and scientists, fire educators and students, forest conservationists, rural homeowners and other interested citizens. We strive to inform and empower fire management workers and their citizen supporters to become torchbearers for the new paradigm of ecological fire management.