

# WILDFIRES

October 2016

## THE SITUATION



Amidst longer and more severe wildfire seasons, largely driven by climate change, **Congress is grappling with how to fund wildfire suppression.** Current budget guidelines set by Congress often force the U.S. Forest Service to transfer funds from fire prevention, fuels management, and non-fire related programs to pay for emergency operations and the suppression of fires. **Proposals to prevent this practice, commonly known as “fire borrowing,” and ensure the availability of adequate resources for both suppression and prevention have been hobbled by Republican indifference.**

## WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

**Outdated budget rules often force the U.S. Forest Service to fight fires by diverting funds from other parts of its budget** – including fire prevention programs. Approximately 30% of wildfire spending goes toward stopping the largest 1-2% of wildfires, but Congressional appropriations don't always cover the cost of these so-called “megafires” and outdated budget rules often force USDA and DOI to divert funds from other parts of their budgets- including fire prevention programs.

## HOW ARE PUBLIC LANDS IMPACTED?

In 2015, **more than 68,000 wildfires burned approximately 10.1 million acres, 7.4 million of which were federal lands.** This figure was the largest acreage burned on record and is larger than the total acreage burned in the previous two years combined - 4.3 million acres in 2013 and 3.6 million acres in 2014 (NICC).

## WHY SHOULD AMERICANS CARE?

**Wildfires can have a devastating impact on communities** adjacent to or within wildfire activity.

## THE FACTS

**~50%** of U.S. Forest Service's annual budget is used to fight wildfires (USDA)

In 1996, fire made up 16% of the Forest Service budget. **Now it's over 50%.** (USDA)

## WHAT'S CONGRESS DOING?

Republicans have offered legislation to increase the pace of logging, without public input or environmental review, and ignored the real problem of Congress' method of funding fire suppression.



**Democrats believe Congress needs to permanently end “fire borrowing”** so that our federal land management agencies no longer have to steal funding from other programs.



**House Republicans are trying to fast-track more logging projects with fewer environmental reviews** and less public input in the name of fire prevention. This will undermine public trust in forest management.

## HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

**Congress needs to end the disruptive and unsustainable practice of “fire borrowing.”** Congress should enact legislation that treats catastrophic wildfires the same way it treats other natural disasters. Such a measure would ensure the availability of adequate funding to address large, costly wildfires and restore funding for programs designed to prevent wildfire and promote forest health.