

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Hearing on Wildland Fire  
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Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the discussion concerning wildland fire management. My perspective is as a member of a public land community, snuggled deep in the heart of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and as a leader in community forestry in the United States for the past 20 years.

I also serve as a core group leader of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC), a community forestry policy education group comprised of county supervisors, environmentalists, forest industry, conservation industry and local non-governmental organizations who work collaboratively at the ground level to improve forest health, provide sustainable commodity volumes and increase economic opportunities for forest and range communities. RVCC members represent over 80 community forestry groups and in 8 western states.

I served on the Western Governor's Association's Forest Health Advisory Group from its inception and in that capacity was able to help draft the first National Fire Plan (the 10 year strategy) and the recent Western Region Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy where I participated in the Fire Adapted Communities working group.

Our local organization, the Watershed Center, was founded twenty years ago prior to the closure of our local sawmill (and the loss of over 40% of our town's payroll dollars). Our forest was included in the Northwest Plan for the Recovery of the Northern Spotted Owl and we needed to build our capacity to adapt to the subsequent economic and social turmoil in our community. To help meet our community's needs we developed training programs for displaced forest workers, started a local small business incubator, built restoration programs and youth programs. We also facilitated a county wide fire planning effort starting in 1998, and participate in the long standing Trinity County Fire Safe Council. We aimed at rebalancing the community's relationship to the local landscape through stewardship and restoration. Today, our small organization in a town of 2,000 people employs 45 local workers during the summer field season (in restoration, fuels reduction, prescribed fire, natural resource surveys and planning, and youth programs) and has contributed over \$1 million to the local economy each year for the past 20 years.

There are hundreds of organizations like ours throughout the national forests of the west. By working collaboratively at the local level we have learned to create social agreement, leverage and integrate public and private resources, and build our strength and skills to deal with this stewardship responsibility we all feel for the land and our community. The knowledge our community forestry and range and fire management collaboratives have created over the years is now being shared throughout the west with community and agency actors in an attempt to more quickly spread successful innovations in wildland fire prevention, mitigation, and suppression. In 2011, as part of the learning of the Western Regional Cohesive Strategy planning group, The Watershed Center and its partners surveyed over 500 local organizations to find out what they felt were key elements contributing to successful fire adaptation strategies.

We have learned that a fire disaster is the result of never just one thing, and a fire safe community is never the result of just one thing. Becoming fire adapted is complex, the landscape and the people are not separable, and we must set up local institutions, infrastructure and culture for living with fire until at least the next ice age.

### **First, the budget.**

The first Ten –Year National Fire Plan (2000-2010) was developed through a robust collaborative process and had four focus areas:

1. Firefighting-Suppression and Preparedness
2. Rehabilitation and Restoration of Fire Adapted Ecosystems
3. Hazardous Fuels Reduction
4. Community Assistance

Over the years from 2000 to 2003 funding for fire fighting increased 57%, restoration and rehabilitation remained relatively even and hazardous fuels gained slightly, about 4%. The Economic Action Program, the highly effective and efficient community assistance flagship was funded at \$12 million per year for the first two years and then zeroed out. This pattern persisted throughout the entire 10 years and continues today.

We believe it is a fatal flaw.

It is a fatal flaw to increase suppression resources at the expense of restoration and fuels reduction. It is a fatal flaw to take away tools which allow the local Forest Service personnel to work with local communities and build social capacity to manage fire on the landscape. It is a fatal flaw to think that suppression by itself can solve the myriad of issues exposed by the increasing fire risk.

In 2009 the Forest Service decided to think about a proactive approach to community wildfire protection. By 2011 a small, elegantly conceived and implemented program, funded at about \$2 million was launched and a national Fire Adapted Communities Coalition was created. By 2012 the National Fire Protection Association (a strong partner) launched an excellent web-site to help communities access tools and information to help themselves become fire adapted ([fireadapted.org](http://fireadapted.org)). So this small investment of \$2 to \$2.6 million a year carries the agency commitment to community assistance to the over 72,000 community groups now identified at risk. Community preparedness through mitigation pays off. The return on \$1 of mitigation investment in the Colorado Springs Fire was \$527 in reduced costs. \$2.6 million in a 2014 wildland fire proposed budget of \$2.2 billion is strikingly absurd. A billion dollars for preparedness within the agency and \$2.6 million to support fire adaptation and preparedness among the communities at risk, many of whom are federal forest communities?

While the administration and congress appear to be walking away from supporting hazardous fuels reduction and community protection, mitigation, and preparedness, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief of the Forest Service announce that “the federal government can’t deal with the fire risks alone”. It is both a relief and a terror to hear those words.

We never intended for the federal government to try to do it alone. We know that only through shared risks and shared responsibility can we protect our landscapes and our communities. We are now being told to “take responsibility”. Well, we’ve been trying to do that through our Community Wildfire

Protection Plans, our Firewise Communities programs, our local offices of emergency services, our Fire Safe Councils. The counties of the west are mobilizing to an extent never seen before. But the west is littered with CWPPs that are not being fully implemented. Why? Because we can write rules and regulation for private development, individual homeowners can pick up a rake and get to work, NRCS will help us with fuels reduction on private agricultural and forest lands, State Fire Assistance will help with clearing around homes but we have very little ability to tackle the fire threat from our adjacent federal lands.

We cannot implement the WUI and the strategically placed fuels treatments identified in spatially explicit CWPPs and there are thousands of locally crafted, collaboratively designed CWPPs throughout the nation. You know the problems with planning, NEPA, appeals, etc so I won't go into that. Suffice it to say, we can't get the work done. So, OMB has decided to reduce funding for hazardous fuels in both DOI and Forest Service in 2014. That is pretty much the source of our terror. If you don't help us build our capacity to become fire adapted (gaining knowledge and experience) and then don't take down the roadblocks to use that knowledge on the land we will all fail.

It appears that our three pronged approach of suppression, land treatments, and community capacity has in reality turned into a one pronged spear of suppression. For over a decade our investments have been wrong.

Today the new "Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy" has a strong focus on interagency and intergovernmental *coordination* and leveraging the three goals of the strategy. Its three goals areas are: 1. Suppression 2. Landscape Resilience, and 3. Fire Adapted Communities. It was created by a very robust national planning effort that included many more organizations and individuals than the 2000 National Fire Plan. But once again, congress and the administration believe the way to cut suppression costs in the long run is to increase suppression budgets, fund the 10 year rolling average out of the Forest Service base budget and, if that's not enough, make the agency borrow from its own accounts to cover the difference. The budgets and resources are not lined up with the new strategy and the current reality. We will not burn our way out of this risk.

If a local Type 3 team cannot contain a fire and a Type 2 or Type 1 Incident Command Team is brought in, then the fire is an emergency and it should be funded off-budget. Period.

### **Enough with the budget priorities, on to solutions!**

In the 2000 National Fire Plan we collaboratively **described the silos** of suppression, restoration, hazardous fuels reduction, and community assistance. We invested heavily in suppression but our states and communities began organizing to deal with fire risks.

In the 2013 National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy, we decided coordination among state, federal, and local actors was a way to **co-ordinate among the silos**. We appear to be investing heavily in suppression but trying to work out inter-agency coordination administratively.

We predict the next iteration will finally focus on **integration of these silos**. That will require evaluation of some of these proposals:

1. Integrated budgets, performance measures, and targets. For example: hazardous fuels reduction projects/restoration projects have acres treated targets and personnel are rewarded

for exceeding targets by reducing unit costs. What if they were rewarded for meeting targets by treating acres in the WUI and identified in CWPPs? Back country acres could count 1:1. Strategic WUI acres could count 3:1. Strategic WUI acres that provided saw timber and utilized biomass could count 5:1. Timber targets that met hazardous fuels reduction goals in the WUI and CWPP strategic areas could count 2:1. Hazardous fuels treatments in the back country that protected critical fish and wildlife habitat could likewise have a multiplier effect. People need to be rewarded for reaching multiple objectives.

2. Integration of agency Wildland Fire Management Plans with CWPPs and tribal eco-cultural restoration plans. We do all lands watershed planning, we need to do all lands fireshed planning. Integrate those plans into the WFDSS, incident decision support documents. Not only will incident teams understand the fire breaks, roads, and water sources available to them on private lands and the restoration goals on public lands, but this up front integration will anticipate the annual tension between the “fire use” mission of the federal agencies and the “fire suppression” mission of the state and local entities by some pre-event guidance about when, where, and how to use fire for resource benefit with spatially explicit documents. It could even enable pre-event planning for mitigation of the post-event impacts so the arguments over BAER and salvage and reforestation could be anticipated and dealt with. The gulf between the Incident Command professionals and the local restoration and fire protection efforts was identified in our Fire Adapted Communities Survey as the most important issue to be addressed. We are planned, digitized, mapped, and organized. Use us.
3. Integrate the skilled workforce. Business Operations can help us build local multi-skilled, cross-trained public and private sectors crews who can remain in place doing conservation practices, prescribed fire, hazardous fuels reduction, and planning on public and private lands. This cross trained workforce can also be trained and equipped to be the volunteer fire department “wildland division” to respond with our federal partners as initial attack for fire incidents. It means using agreements with local ngos and volunteer fire departments for fuels management. It means deliberately using stewardship contracting authority to package work across a full field season for crews of twenty and awarding them locally as a best value to the nation. Local contractors and ngos can then use NRCS funded projects, private landowner projects, state fire assistance projects to fill out the field season and keep that crew available not only for wildfire events, but also for on-call pile burning and prescribed fire. This model is emerging and we need to make it easier to do. An in-place stewardship workforce is our next big task.
4. Use the tribes. Building a culture of fire takes times. Building the desire in the culture to learn how to live with fire takes a long time. Tribal cultures are leading the way with their eco-cultural restoration plans. We need to be brave enough to support them. Our federal agencies need to be nuanced enough and flexible enough to engage with these highly motivated and highly knowledgeable people and let them help us find our way forward to locally adapted socio-ecological systems.

The people who live and work in and adjacent to our federal lands have tried to be good partners to the federal agencies. We have to figure out how to live with fire on this landscape. It is only increasing. Instead of putting all fire out, we need to increase the good fires and decrease the bad ones. We need to figure out the role of logging and silviculture to adapt to climate change and mitigate fire risk. And since we are going to be experiencing fire on our lands over and over and over, we need to find a way to manage the forest resources to produce revenue for its perpetual management and protection. Like the Secretary says, “we can’t do it alone”. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this most important discussion.

## A Comparison of Suppression Funding Levels (including FLAME), U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior\*

	Forecast (1)	10-Year Average (2)		FY13 CR Levels (PL 112-175) (3)	Sequestered FY13 CR Levels with Sequestration (4)	Difference between Sequestered FY13 CR Levels and Forecast	Difference between Sequestered FY13 CR Levels and FY13 10-Yr Average	Difference between Sequestered FY13 CR Levels and FY14 10-Yr Average
		FY13	FY14					
USFS	\$985	\$931	\$996	\$852	\$807	-\$178	-\$124	-\$189
DOI	\$281	\$369	\$378	\$369	\$349	\$68	-\$20	-\$29

\* All values are in million dollars and include annual suppression and FLAME levels

Sources:

(1) Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act Suppression Expenditures for Interior and Agriculture Agencies: March 2013 Forecasts for Fiscal Year 2013

(2) FY2013 and FY2014 USDA Forest Service Budget Justification; FY2013 and FY2014 DOI Budget Justification - Wildland Fire Management

(3) Levels are adjusted for inflation but do not include sequestration

(4) Budget Control Act of 2011 (PL 112-25) - 5.3% Sequestration cut to discretionary programs

The big question here is “where is the extra money going to come from?”

