



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON **NATURAL RESOURCES**

THE RESILIENT FEDERAL FORESTS ACT OF 2017

Ending fire borrowing in a fiscally responsible manner

BACKGROUND

H.R. 2936, the “Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017,” solves the long-standing problem of fire borrowing, the practice of robbing fire prevention and forest management accounts to pay for fire suppression.

Specifically, the bill ensures wildfire suppression funding is included in disaster cap calculations and creates a new subaccount under the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) managed by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to fund suppression of catastrophic wildfires. The Forest Service or Department of the Interior would be able to request funds from FEMA when the exhaustion of all fire suppression funds is imminent. FEMA would then transfer additional suppression funds to the agencies to fight fires. Funds transferred from the DRF can only be used for fire suppression.

This year has been the most expensive fire season on record, with the federal government spending nearly \$2.5 billion to suppress fires on more than 8.8 million acres across the U.S. In FY 2017, the Forest Service borrowed \$576.5 million from non-fire accounts to pay for fire suppression.

COST CONTAINMENT MEASURES

- The bill creates a wildfire disaster subaccount under the DRF; this ensures that wildfire disaster funding does not compete with other natural disasters such as hurricanes.
- Any funds spent on state, local or private lands would be reimbursed to the DRF. Other sources of funding through FEMA are already available for communities impacted by wildfires—this bill prevents any ‘double dipping.’
- The bill only allows for the transfer of funds from the DRF subaccount if the agencies have been appropriated the 10-year average of wildfire suppression costs and the agencies have exhausted all available suppression dollars (including carryover from previous years).
- The bill requires annual reports to Congress and the public on fire accounting, cost containment, lessons learned and other measures to help reduce the cost of firefighting.
- The bill does not create any new mandatory spending.
- The bill is subject to appropriations and still falls under the caps set in the Budget Control Act.