

Opening Statement of Interior & Environment Subcommittee
Chairman Ken Calvert
U.S. Forest Service FY 2015 Budget Hearing
Chief of the Forest Service, Tom Tidwell
Wednesday, April 2, 2014
As Prepared

The Committee will come to order.

Chief Tidwell, I'd like to welcome you to today's hearing. Our hearing today will address the fiscal year 2015 budget priorities for the U.S. Forest Service.

As you know, California is suffering through a severe drought crisis that threatens to bring us the worst fire season we have seen in recent years – maybe ever. Already in the first quarter of fiscal year 2014, California has experienced twelve large wildland fires with suppression expenses totaling \$205 million, compared to the first quarter of fiscal year 2013 when California only saw seven large wildland fires totaling \$14 million.

When measuring the first quarter of fiscal year 2014 against the first quarter of fiscal year 2013, we have already spent \$191 million more on large wildland fires this fiscal year. The fiscal year 2013 fire funding shortfall for the Forest Service was \$600 million, and the shortfall for the Department of the Interior was \$28.5 million, all of which Congress repaid in fiscal year 2014. If the fires in California are any indication of what is to come, I'm concerned about where we might be headed in terms of a fire funding shortfall for fiscal year 2014.

I say all of this to highlight the need to fundamentally change how we fund wildland fires in the future. I appreciate the administration's recognition of the hard work done by Chairman Simpson here in the House, and Senators Wyden and Crapo in the Senate, by including a similar provision to their respective cap adjustment bills in the budget request for fiscal year 2015. I look forward to working with you this year as we try to address this issue.

The Forest Service is certainly more than just wildland fire, so I'd like to take a moment to comment on the budget request in general. Excluding the request of \$954 million for the wildland fire budget cap adjustment, the total Forest Service request for fiscal year 2015 is \$4.8 billion, a \$726.4 million, or 13.3 percent, reduction from the fiscal year 2014 enacted level, including the \$600 million in suppression shortfall repayment. With suppression costs growing from approximately 13 percent of the agency's total budget just 10 years ago to over 40 percent in 2014, and a total budget that is shrinking, it appears as though the Forest Service will be doing less forest management and restoration than it should be.

I have concerns about the proposed reductions of \$17.5 million in research and development, \$4.5 million in urban and community forestry, and \$5.8 million in grazing management, to name just a few. I understand the reduction in grazing management is proposed to be offset with a new administrative fee, estimated to generate approximately \$5 million. This grazing fee was proposed in fiscal year 2014 and Congress denied the request. I'm sure Chairman Simpson will

have plenty to say on this topic, so I won't belabor the point, but suffice it to say I can't imagine the outcome for this request would be different this year.

In closing, Chief Tidwell, I want to express my appreciation to your fine professional staff. Our subcommittee simply couldn't do its work without the folks sitting behind you. Thanks to each of you for everything you do.

With that, I'm happy to yield to the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Moran, for any opening remarks he would like to make.

#####