



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2016 Budget Hearing - U.S. Forest Service

Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

Chief Tidwell and Mr. Dixon, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing on the fiscal year 2016 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service.

Overall, the President requests a total of \$4.9 billion in discretionary funding for the Forest Service for FY 2016. This is \$130 million less than the FY 2015 enacted level. A total of \$794 million is requested for Wild Land Fire Management. This represents more than 47 percent of the entire Forest Service budget. In addition, a budget cap adjustment of \$854 million is requested.

This Subcommittee continues to be concerned about the costs of fighting wild fire and the effects it has on Forest Service budgets, programs and management. We were fortunate that the 2014 fire season was below normal with just 87 percent of the 10-year average number of wild fires. There were more than 63,000 wild fires reported with about 3.6 million acres burned. This is just 53 percent of the 10-year average.

But as we look to the 2015 season, we have reason to be concerned. Since January 1, there have been more than 5,700 fires that have burned more than 91,000 acres of land. For comparison, about 68,000 acres burned over the same time period last year. The ten-year average is 138,000 acres burned. These figures combined with the fact that California continues to suffer through an exceptional drought and parts of the country, including Minnesota, have the potential for above normal wild fire activity in the next few months, are worrisome. We may be headed toward a fire funding shortfall again.

I would like to thank you, Chief Tidwell, for the Administration's efforts to change the way we budget for wild fires. I also would like to express my appreciation for Congressman Simpson's efforts to educate our colleagues and keep the pressure on Congress to address the issue. Eight members of this Subcommittee are cosponsors of his bill. We will continue to work on this.

As I have mentioned in the Subcommittee's previous hearings, we are operating in a very constrained funding environment. We are bound by spending caps under existing law. Of course, we will do our best to address the highest priority needs, but any increases most likely will have to be offset against other accounts and programs in this bill.

Let me mention a few of the increases and decreases that the Subcommittee will be closely reviewing and discussing today. The major increases include \$5 million for trails; \$8 million for the Forest Legacy Program; \$16 million for Land Acquisition; \$20 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration; and \$30 million for Deferred Maintenance.

Some notable reductions include \$4 million for Research and Development; \$4 million for International Forestry – Ms. McCollum, I know this is an important issue for you; \$4 million for Urban and Community Forestry; \$6 million for Grazing Management, which will be offset by a new fee; and \$14 million for Roads.

The budget request also proposes again to consolidate a number of accounts into the Integrated Resource Restoration account and the Land Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring account. I look forward to hearing about how the IRR pilot has worked.

Chief, I would like to thank you for your work on behalf of the American people and the nation's forests. We also thank you for the assistance your staff provides to the Subcommittee. They are a wonderful, helpful resource to us.

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