



Chairman Ken Calvert

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

U.S. Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Hearing February 24, 2016 Opening Statement As Prepared

Good morning. I would like to extend a warm welcome to my colleagues, our witnesses and the audience as we begin the fiscal year 2017 appropriations process. Today is the Interior and Environment Subcommittee's first oversight hearing of the year.

Chief Tidwell and Mr. Dixon, I would like to welcome you back to the Subcommittee. We are pleased to be able to hear from you regarding the fiscal year 2017 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service.

Similar to last fiscal year, the President requests a total of \$4.9 billion in discretionary funding for the Forest Service for FY 2017. This is \$150 million less than the FY 2016 enacted level. A total of \$2.5 billion is requested for Wild Land Fire Management. This represents nearly 50 percent of the entire Forest Service budget request. In addition, a budget cap adjustment of \$864 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. Technically, the 2015 fire season is considered below normal at 93 percent of the 10 year average for the number of wild fires reported. However, that statistic belies a devastating reality. In 2015, more than 68,000 fires burned more than 10 million acres, causing an agonizing loss of life, destroying more than 4,600 homes and other properties, and devastating local and regional landscapes and communities. The toll on our firefighters and supporting staff also was severe. According to the National Interagency Coordination Center, the requests for firefighting resources were right at or exceeded the 10-year average, and the requests for air support that were fulfilled exceeded their averages.

I would like to thank you, Chief Tidwell, for the Administration's efforts to change the way we budget for wild fires. I also thank Congressman Simpson for keeping the pressure on Congress to address the issue. As of yesterday, Congressman Simpson has convinced 145 of our colleagues to cosponsor his bill, including all members of this Subcommittee.

While the issue of how to fund firefighting costs seems to dominate most discussions about the Forest Service, there are numerous other issues, including air asset management, law enforcement, land acquisition, and basic budgeting and program management, among others, that need to be attended to. The Forest Service must demonstrate that it is accountable, transparent, and able to improve the condition of its forests, all while managing unpredictable fire seasons.

This is a very difficult challenge, and I realize that it is not entirely in your hands. Congress must provide the financial resources and address policy matters that limit the agency's ability manage the nation's forests. But some parts are in your hands, especially accounting, budgeting and program management. I look forward to talking with you more about them today and as we prepare the House bill for fiscal year 2017.

Chief, you and the entire Forest Service staff deserve our appreciation for your work on behalf of the American people and the Nation's forests. We know that all of you care deeply for our forests and the communities that depend on them. Thank you.

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