

# Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership

**A lasting voice for innovative management and investment in the public forests of  
North Carolina's mountains.**

October 2, 2015

The Honorable .....

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ms./Mr. ....:

We are writing as members of the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership to express our concerns over the practice of fire borrowing, where funding for normal Forest Service operations are borrowed to suppress wildfires across the U.S., but especially in the West. Fire management has been an important function of the U.S. Forest Service since its inception. However, fire suppression has also led to huge fuel loads that make wildfires more dangerous and more difficult to control. Combined with a warmer climate and higher population density, wildfire suppression have been on an upward trend for more than 20 years. Wildfire suppression took a full 42% of the U.S. Forest Service budget in 2014, up from 15% in 1995. With record drought and heat from California to the Northern Rockies, 2015 projects to be another expensive year for fighting wildfires.

We are a diverse partnership composed of forest products, economic development, recreation, wildlife, water, cultural heritage, and conservation groups and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. We recognize that, while we emphasize different values in National Forests, we all have much to gain by working together. We also believe that the practice of fire borrowing is crippling the Forest Service's ability to provide the goods and services we rely on. While some of the funds borrowed from individual programs are typically repaid in the next fiscal year, the borrowing of staff and funding from mission-critical programs delays implementation of many projects, including some that reduce wildfire risk.

On National Forests in North Carolina – Nantahala-Pisgah, Uwharrie, and Croatan National Forests – the effects are seen in staff being sent out of state and in program budgets being frozen and borrowed from. This means that important work in our state is delayed and sometimes goes without funding that was initially allowed for it.

Nationally, expenditures for timber, wildlife, recreation, and conservation are declining as fire costs soar. According to 2014 U.S. Forest Service budget figures, vegetation and watershed management is down 22%, facilities maintenance is down 67%, road maintenance is down 46%, trail maintenance down 14%, and wildlife and fisheries management is down 17%, partly because of the need to borrow funds from these core programs to fight disastrous wildfires. Yet, protecting lives and property from wildfire remains an essential task.

The U.S. Forest Service has the funding and capabilities to manage most wildfires. It is the most expensive 2% of fires that consume over 70% of the fire budget. The Forest Service will lose its ability to “Care for the Land and Serve the People” if current funding trends are not reversed. Therefore, we, the undersigned, endorse the approach of ending fire borrowing and treating the most expensive wildfires like the natural disasters they are. Large wildfires should be fought with dedicated natural disaster funding rather than borrowing the funds from other essential Forest Service programs. We urge you to support

The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2015, or similar measures, to solve the problem of fire borrowing as legislation moves through both houses of Congress.

Sincerely yours,

Leadership Team, Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership

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Members of the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership:

American Whitewater  
Back Country Horsemen of America & NC  
Carolina Mountain Club  
High Country Hikers  
Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition  
International Mountain Bicycling Association  
Mountain True  
NC Youth Camp Association  
Root Cause  
Southern Appalachian Mineral Society  
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards  
Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association  
Special Permit Holders  
Sustainable Foothills  
The Wilderness Society  
Wild South  
Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy  
Ecological Services & Markets  
NC Wildlife Federation  
Sierra Club  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy  
Southern Environmental Law Center

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