



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

October 31, 2017
(House Rules)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

H.R. 2936 - Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017

(Rep. Westerman, R-AR, and 18 cosponsors)

The Administration strongly believes that funding for wildland fire management must be addressed in order to enable the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to better manage the Nation's forests and other public lands. The Administration's second disaster funding request, submitted to Congress on October 4, 2017, underscored this belief. The request also noted the Administration's belief that land management reforms are critical to solving the problem of "fire borrowing" -- taking funds from forest management programs to cover fire costs that exceed appropriations -- in a comprehensive manner, rather than through a funding-only approach.

The Administration appreciates the intent of H.R. 2936, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017, and is supportive of land management reforms like those outlined in the legislation. The Administration, however, has concerns about the legislation's revisions to the Stafford Act, which would force competition for funding between wildfires on Federal land and other disasters already covered by the Stafford Act, including hurricanes.

Wildland Fire Management Funding

Last year, Federal wildfire suppression spending reached \$2.9 billion, an amount that signals clearly the need for Congress to address the rising cost of fire suppression operations. The dependence on "fire borrowing" to cover funding shortfalls in times of severe wildfire impedes the missions of our land management agencies, including by taking critical funding from programs that help reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, restore and maintain healthy functioning ecosystems, and yield timber production.

The Administration, however, has concerns with re-purposing the Stafford Act to address wildfires. The purpose of the Stafford Act is to assist State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments that become overwhelmed when responding to and recovering from natural disasters affecting their jurisdictions. H.R. 2936 would modify the Stafford Act by creating a new type of disaster declaration to address the cost of wildfire suppression on Federal land, thereby changing long-standing principles governing Federal support to SLTT governments. As we have seen in this year's historic Atlantic hurricane season, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) must continue to be focused on its existing mission, and the Stafford Act's Disaster Relief Fund must remain dedicated solely to that mission.

Instead of the approach outlined in H.R. 2936, the Administration supports a separate, annual cap adjustment for wildfire suppression operations, which will resolve concerns about the sufficiency of funds for wildfire suppression and avoid unnecessary competition for Stafford Act funds.

Improving Forest Management

The Administration appreciates H.R. 2936's recognition that fixing the funding component of fire borrowing will not, on its own, stop the worsening trend of catastrophic wildfires. Meaningful forest management reforms to strengthen our ability to restore the Nation's forests and improve their resilience to destructive wildfires must be a part of any permanent solution. H.R. 2936's provisions that expedite environmental approval for proactive forest management, including hazardous fuel reduction and post-fire timber salvage and reforestation actions, are important steps forward. The Administration supports and will continue to work with Congress on the details of the forest management reform proposals.

Although the Administration has concerns with H.R. 2936's modifications to the Stafford Act, the Administration will continue working with Congress to enact a sustainable solution to "fire borrowing" that does not adversely affect FEMA's critical disaster relief funding and that recognizes the need for a comprehensive solution to the problem of wildfires.

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