

Wildfire funding issue may be solved in energy conference

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At a news conference this August, Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID), Jim Risch (R-ID), and Ron Wyden (D-OR) spoke optimistically that a House-Senate conference committee can work to resolve differences on the North American Energy Security and Infrastructure Act of 2016 (S. 2012 & H.R. 8).

The conference committee will try to solve the budget problems of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which has been forced to borrow cash from other USFS accounts to cover rising wildfire fighting costs that now consume more than half of the agency's budget.

As a solution, Sens. Crapo, Risch, and Wyden suggest providing disaster funding for wildfires to match the 10-year rolling average for fire suppression, and call for more forest management practices, such as forest clearing, to reduce the risk of fire spreading.

Meanwhile, the Obama Administration and others, including the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are currently proposing a different solution that would appropriate only 70 percent of the 10-year average for fire management costs, use emergency funds to cover additional needs, and leave the remaining 30 percent for proactive forest management and resiliency plans. They argue that the proposed bill fails to solve the underlying problem: more fires and rising costs.

Despite the disagreement, Sen. Wyden hopes support from the Senate's third-ranking Democrat, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY), who has complained that the budget borrowing drains resources away from fighting natural hazard problems in the East, will build bipartisan support for the bill.

Sources: Congress.gov, [Daily Dispatch](#), [E&E PM](#), [Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources](#), [The Spokesman-Review](#)
