

## Report: USFS spending more than half of its budget to fight wildfires

August 5, 2015

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) released a report on August 5 detailing the impacts of increasing costs of fighting wildfires on its non-fire work. Wildfire seasons have become longer, more severe, and more difficult to predict, forcing the USFS to spend over half of its current budget to fight wildfire and shift \$700 million from non-fire programs. The agency predicts that in the next ten years, it will spend two-thirds of its appropriated budget on dealing with rising wildfire costs.

The USFS' non-fire programs provide critical ecological services that help to prevent wildfires, such as protecting watersheds, fighting invasive species, and reducing hazardous fuels. However, the increasing severity of wildfire season—burning twice the acreage it did 30 years ago and lasting 78 days longer than in the 1970s—has crowded out USFS forest stewardship programs. The report underpins the Administration's proposal to restructure wildfire budgeting to fund roughly 70 percent of anticipated fire suppression costs through the USFS budget, with remaining suppression costs covered by a separate fire suppression cap. This proposal would eliminate "fire borrowing," the practice of dipping into non-fire funds within the USFS budget when suppression funding runs dry. Supporters argue that the proposal would free up funds for wildfire mitigation to help reduce the severity of future fires. Opponents counter that the USFS budget should include the entire cost of suppressing fires and that the proposal allows USFS to circumvent statutory budget caps.

Sources: E&E News, U.S. Forest Service

---