

**Alaska Wilderness League * Bark * Center for Biological Diversity
Cherokee Forest Voices * Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship
Conservation Northwest * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice
Environment America * Epic-Environmental Protection Information Center
Georgia ForestWatch * Greater Yellowstone Coalition
High Country Conservation Advocates * Kentucky Heartwood
Klamath Forest Alliance * Los Padres ForestWatch
National Audubon Society * National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council * San Juan Citizens Alliance
Sierra Club * Southeast Alaska Conservation Council
Southern Environmental Law Center * The Wilderness Society
Umpqua Watersheds, Inc. * Western Watersheds Project
Wild Earth Guardians * Wild Virginia**

June 13, 2016

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Concerns regarding the Wildfire Budgeting Response and Forest Management Act discussion draft

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we write to highlight serious concerns with the Wildfire Budgeting, Response and Forest Management Act policy discussion draft that was released for public comment on May 25, 2016. We understand the draft may be the subject of a hearing in the coming weeks. Unfortunately, the draft fails to effectively resolve the wildfire budget problem and includes provisions that threaten the conservation and management integrity of our public forestlands and our bedrock environmental laws.

This proposal limits environmental review and opportunities for public input on management of national forests and other public lands, and alters judicial review of certain forestry projects. It carves huge loopholes in the National Environmental Policy Act. Further, the draft lacks consistent requirements for forest management projects to: utilize best available science, maintain old-growth forests, focus on restoration, and preserve roadless areas. Alarming, the bill also promotes old-

growth logging in the Tongass National Forest and could delay indefinitely any plan to transition to a more sustainable regional economy in that area. These provisions are certain to generate conflict and are unlikely to yield defensible decisions and positive environmental outcomes. They should not be a part of the discussion.

The draft also falls short of a real fire funding fix, and the undersigned groups do not support this approach. Among other things, any solution to the fire funding problem must address both fire borrowing and the dramatic erosion of the remaining Forest Service budget over time. This discussion draft only deals with the former and not the latter. It ignores the fact that over half of the Forest Service budget is already expended on fire suppression and that unless Congress addresses this budget erosion problem, soon only 30 percent of the agency's budget will be available for all other agency functions. Moreover, we understand that the language in the draft regarding fire borrowing is simply a placeholder suggestion to the Budget Committee.

While many of our respective organizations are providing individual, detailed comments on the draft, we wanted to take this opportunity to convey to you and other members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee our strong and collective overarching concerns with the proposal. We urge you to oppose anything short of a comprehensive response to the challenge of fire funding, to reject efforts to tack on harmful forest management provisions that promote ill-conceived logging and to steadfastly defend national forests, including essential safeguards that help protect wildlife, public access, and public participation in forest management.

Sincerely,

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