Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 13, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Granger:

We appreciate you and the staff's continued work on the fiscal year 2022 (FY22) appropriations bills and the strong provisions across the subcommittees on wildfire and climate change related activities. As you enter the final stages of your work, we write in strong support of President Biden's recent proposal to build a more responsive and resilient wildland firefighting workforce, improve wildfire response capabilities, utilize data and technology to protect communities, and reduce the risk of wildfires through hazardous fuels management and mitigation investments.

As Members representing western states that continue to contend with the reality of increasingly large wildfires and nearly year-long fire seasons, these are issues that we have been working to address for years. The cycle of extreme heat and drought made the last fire season a historic disaster. This year is already on track to be worse with 67 large fires already having burned over 900,000 acres across 12 states. We are grateful to finally have a partner in the White House who understands the need for robust investment in wildfire preparedness and risk mitigation efforts at the federal level.

Specifically, we support the funding levels provided for the U.S. Forest Service's Hazardous Fuels Treatment program, the Department of Interior and Forest Service wildfire suppression activities, and the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund account, and request dedicated funding for wildfire science across the federal science agencies, and language to provide long term fixes to federal firefighting workforce challenges. While funding allocated in the current bill will be crucial, given the scale of the backlog, we ask that a future infrastructure package include additional resources for hazardous fuels mitigation.

As climate change all but ensures an ever-expanding fire season in the years to come, we must begin to adapt our federal resources to better align with needs on the ground. It is time for the federal government to start treating wildfires more like other major disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods by supporting more than just traditional disaster relief efforts. We ask that you provide strong across-the-board funding for wildfire programs and research, increase funding for hazardous fuels reduction, fully fund the President's Budget request for suppression operations, and that you ensure the wildfire priorities outlined in the attached White House statement be reflected in the final appropriations bills.

We appreciate your attention to our request and look forward to working with you as the bills come to the floor, on making the right investments vital to the public health, public safety, and resiliency of our communities.

Sincerely,

ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress

ED PERLMUTTER
Member of Congress

SUZANNE BONAMICI
Member of Congress

JIMMY PANETTA
Member of Congress

JOSH HARDER
Member of Congress

/s/
AMI BERA, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
JULIA BROWNLEY
Member of Congress

/s/
SALUD CARBAJAL
Member of Congress

/s/
TONY CÁRDENAS
Member of Congress

/s/
JUDY CHU
Member of Congress

/s/
J. LUIS CORREA
Member of Congress

/s/
JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

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JASON CROW
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/s/
DIANA DEGETTE
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ANNA G. ESHOO
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SARA JACOBS
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DINA TITUS
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/s/
JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress

/s/
MAXINE WATERS
Member of Congress

FACT SHEET: The Biden-Harris Administration Acts to Address the Growing Wildfire Threat

JUNE 30, 2021 • STATEMENTS AND RELEASES

The National Interagency Fire Center forecast predicts above normal fire potential for much of the West, in large part driven by severe drought conditions that are impacting nearly ninety percent of the region. Since 2015, the United States has experienced, on average, roughly 100 more large wildfires every year than the year before – and this wildfire season is already outpacing last season in terms of the number of large fires to date. Climate change is driving the devastating intersection of extreme heat, drought, and wildland fire danger across the United States. Decades of shifting development patterns, land and fire management decisions, and climate change have resulted in wildfires that move with a speed and intensity previously unseen. This has created conditions in which wildfires overwhelm response capabilities, resulting in billions of dollars in economic losses, damage to natural resources, devastation to communities, and the tragic loss of human life.

In preparation for this wildfire season, the Biden Administration has convened a series of meetings on wildfire preparedness and prevention efforts to determine what more can be done to prepare for and prevent wildfires. President Biden met last week with FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell and his White House Homeland preparedness team to discuss ongoing efforts to prevent, prepare for and respond to extreme weather events and to underscore the importance of prompt delivery of support to communities in need.

Today, President Biden and Vice President Harris will meet with Governors from Western states, Cabinet officials and private sector partners to discuss specific actions the public and private sector are each taking to strengthen prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and response efforts – and to protect communities across our country from wildfires and their devastating impacts. During today's meeting, the President will direct a number of actions, in close coordination with State and local governments and the private sector, to ensure the Federal Government can most effectively protect public safety and deliver assistance to our people in times of urgent need.

The President will also highlight the need to invest in wildfire prevention and risk mitigation

efforts, including the nearly $50 billion in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework.

The Biden-Harris Administration Is Taking Action to Respond to Wildfires this Year:

Building a More Responsive and Resilient Wildland Firefighting Workforce

Bolster firefighter pay. Firefighters must be fairly paid for the grueling work they are willing to take on. From supporting COVID-19 efforts to fighting wildfires, our Federal wildland firefighters have been on nearly nonstop deployments since January 2020. That is why today we are announcing that we are fulfilling the President's commitment that firefighters will not make less than $15 an hour this year. In addition, permanent firefighters working on the front lines paid at up to a GS-9 level will receive up to a 10 percent retention incentive and temporary workers who commit to continue this season would receive a $1000 Spot/Star Award this year. These are short-term solutions to support our Federal wildland firefighters, especially due to the multiple impacts of COVID and climate change this year. The Administration will work with Congress on longer-term much needed compensation, benefit, and work-life balance reforms for Federal wildland firefighters.

Extend hiring of temporary firefighters to ensure effective response throughout this year's fire season. To mitigate concerns about Federal firefighter capacity this year, today we are announcing that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has approved an exemption to extend seasonal Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Interior (DOI) wildland fire employees to work additional hours beyond their term. Because of climate change, wildland firefighting is no longer a seasonal endeavor. Fires are burning later into the season and temporary employees often reach their limited hours earlier in the year. This week, OPM also approved an extension of the Forest Service's (USFS) direct hire authority for wildland firefighters and support personnel. These proactive personnel management actions will help sustain the Nation's vital Federal wildland firefighting capacity. We also recognize the need for a sustainable long-term staffing approach into the future that offers more permanent, stable employment.

Continue transition to a more permanent firefighting workforce. With fire seasons turning into fire years, it is imperative to have a year-round workforce that is available to respond at any time, that is supported and equitably compensated, and is available to undertake preventive actions like hazardous fuels management treatments during periods of low fire activity. DOI has committed to hiring 210 new employees and converting 575 employees from career seasonal to full-time employees during this fiscal year. Additionally, DOI is providing funding for 42 new tribal positions and the conversion of 153 tribal positions from career seasonal to full-time employees to support wildfire response. USFS will continue to prioritize

expanding its permanent wildland firefighting workforce.

Improving Wildfire Response Capabilities

Provide robust response through 15,000 Federal firefighters and additional surge capacity. Wildland firefighting is a complex, multi-agency effort, and our Federal firefighters work side-by-side with their State, Tribal, and local counterparts on a daily basis. USFS and DOI maintain a capacity of over 15,000 Federal firefighters who are able to respond to wildfires across the nation. USFS and DOI can also activate up to 13,000 additional employees throughout their departments to support wildfire response. These surge employees provide additional capacity to the response, ranging from firefighting capabilities for qualified employees, to critical response support through incident management, acquisition, and human resources. USFS and DOI have additional capacity to call 11,000 administratively determined personnel from outside their departments to support the response. These employees are generally retired agency personnel who can be dispatched to support incident management teams and other firefighting functions.

Train and equip military personnel to be ready to quickly support wildland fires as needed. Congress made Federal funding available to train and equip the National Guard to conduct firefighting operations to support state response to wildfires. All eleven states who requested this support have received the funding and training is underway. The Department of Defense (DOD) has also pre-identified two military units, with 200 personnel each, to receive training and specialized equipment to support firefighting operations if required.

Increase aviation capacity to support immediate response. Aviation assets are critical in the management of wildfires to slow or decrease the intensity of the fire and enable safe operations for firefighters on the ground. This year, the USFS has increased the overall capacity of airtankers and helicopters to ensure their availability during peak fire activity. USFS and DOI share aviation resources, which includes up to 34 air-tankers and over 200 helicopters to boost our Nation's wildfire response capabilities. When needed, DOD is able to provide aviation support through National Guard and Air Force Reserve C-130 crews and helicopter transport crews and equipment to support medical evacuation or water drops for fire response.

Provide critical financial support to assist in wildfire response. This Administration is ready to assist communities at the start of severe fires with critical Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAGs). Issued through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), FMAGs assist states, local, and tribal governments with the mitigation, management, and control of fires which threaten such destruction as would constitute a major disaster.

FEMA has approved 9 FMAGs since the start of 2021.

Utilizing Data and Technology to Protect Communities

Leverage satellite and emerging technologies to rapidly detect new, often remote, wildland fires. The Federal government has a number of new, innovative ways to detect and notify emergency personnel when wildfires start. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) uses satellite-based early wildfire detection to provide initial location information to first responders, allowing them to attack fires more quickly. NOAA is partnering with other Federal Departments and Agencies and state governments to expand the use of this technology and its associated notification system. The FY 2022 President's Budget includes $15 million to support fire weather activities, including a new NOAA Fire Weather Testbed to provide improved operations, service delivery, and decision making based on the latest science and research. This virtual and onsite infrastructure will bring together fire weather community researchers, operational experts, and emergency managers across Federal, state, local, territorial, and tribal governments, academia, and the private sector to develop new, impact-based decision support tools, products, and models to address wildfires. The President's Budget also proposes a new wildfire applications program within NASA to develop innovative tools and applications using satellite data and the latest science to assist with wildland fire management. Working with the wildland fire management agencies, this program will support community-based consortiums to co-develop and pilot applications in all phases of wildfires.

Use research to improve early detection wildfire sensors. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is also focusing its research agenda on innovations that will improve the Nation's ability to predict, detect, and control wildfires. Just two weeks ago, DHS Science and Technology announced successful Phase II trials of four prototype early detection wildfire sensors. Through a variety of sampling sensors and advanced algorithms, these technologies, once deployed, will provide early warning to fire-vulnerable communities, ultimately providing valuable time that will aid responders and save lives.

Use the latest science and technologies to enhance our wildfire response. The Federal government manages all fires using a risk-based suppression strategy. As we head into the peak of a long, arduous season, it is more important than ever we deploy firefighters when they have the highest probability of success. USFS and DOI are using the latest science and technologies to enhance our operational capability and decision making so when firefighting resources are used, they are able to work safely and effectively and protect critical infrastructure and natural resources. USFS researchers have specifically created a mapping unit called "Firesheds" that aggregates areas that have similar fire behavior and community

risk characteristics, allowing USFS to more effectively prioritize hazardous fuel treatments. The Department of Energy (DOE), through the National Labs, have a variety of programs underway to develop sensors and patches to help prevent structural energy infrastructure failures that have the potential to ignite wildfires.

Prepare to address potential power impacts as a result of wildfires. Approximately 10 percent of wildfire ignitions are sparked by faults on electrical grid infrastructure or electric equipment failures. There is also a growing risk of intentional power shutoffs in anticipation of or due to wildfires. In order to minimize rolling blackouts during extreme heat and wildfire risk, DOE is prepared to authorize utilities to run power plants at their maximum capacity to best meet emergency needs. DOE also uses its Environment for Analysis of Geo-Located Energy Information (EAGLE-I) tool to give first responders and State Emergency Management Officials information on the status of the power grid, which is critical in facilitating response and recovery efforts. Finally, DOE will leverage the analytical capabilities of the National Laboratories to provide tools for damage assessments, predictive analysis, and grid management to support response efforts. This tool is available to Federal, state, local, tribal governments and first responders and will include wildfire data in its analysis in 2022.

Use research and modeling to protect firefighters and residents from smoke and dangerous air. Wildfires can lead to smoke and water quality concerns that may impact public health, and the Administration is undertaking a number of efforts to mitigate these concerns. NOAA uses satellite data and models to forecast smoke and communicate areas of dangerous air quality and low visibility. During a wildfire, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also monitors and models smoke, develops smoke outlooks, and supports community public health notifications and guidance. EPA is developing and expanding availability of the Vehicle Add-on Mobile Monitoring System (VAMMS) for use in heavy smoke impacted areas to provide ground truth on smoke plume and air quality models. EPA is also evaluating how filtration devices, such as facemasks and portable air cleaners, can reduce exposures during smoke episodes. With funding from the American Rescue Plan, EPA is piloting a project with Western states to use schools as clean air shelters and cooling centers during heat and smoke events.

Provide actionable information to help Americans stay safe during a wildfire. FEMA recently redesigned its Wildland Urban Interface website to highlight resources and information to assist states and local communities in preventing and preparing for wildfires. EPA developed a wildfire smoke guide, in collaboration with a range of Federal and State partners, to provide specific information on the impacts of smoke and actions individuals can take to reduce their exposure. EPA and the USFS launched the AirNow Fire and Smoke Map , which combines data from EPA's air monitoring network with data from low-cost sensors, to

improve air quality and smoke information available to the public during fire events. In July, the EPA will add the Fire and Smoke Map to the AirNow mobile app, making this information more readily available to the public.

Reducing the Risk of Wildfires throughHazardous Fuels Management and Mitigation Investments

Provide assistance to mitigate the impacts of future wildfires and protect communities. The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program provides a critical opportunity for governments to invest in resilience before a disaster. In FY 2020, $500 million was made available through the BRIC program to support states, local communities, tribes, and territories for pre-disaster mitigation. In May, the Administration doubled FEMA BRIC program resources – to $1 billion – for FY 2021. Today, FEMA is announcing that one of the FY 2020 BRIC projects selected will provide $37 million in federal funds for an innovative wildfire mitigation project in Sonoma, CA that focuses on mitigation activities at both the large wildland-scale and the neighborhood-scale in order to build more resilient communities. FEMA will soon announce additional FY 2020 BRIC projects selected for Federal funding. FEMA also provides assistance to mitigate future wildfires under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) Post-Fire for communities. FEMA Regional offices are coordinating with state and tribal partners to highlight the opportunities made available through these grant programs.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework invests nearly $50 billion to build resilience to wildfires and helps western communities prepare for droughts. Last year, the United States faced 22 extreme weather and climate-related disaster events with loses over $1 billion – a cumulative price tag of nearly $100 billion. The bipartisan infrastructure framework will help the country prepare for those events by investing in forest management and upgrades to critical infrastructure — like elevating buildings, roads, and bridges, hardening physical infrastructure, and winterizing the power grid – as well as funding state and local infrastructure improvements and emergency response strategies, such as planning grants to support development of evacuation routes or upgrading community shelters. The Framework will also make it easier for low-income families to buy flood insurance. And it will help Western farmers, ranchers, tribes, families, and communities better prepare for future droughts. It will invest in ecosystem restoration, such as the restoration of wetlands that can reduce flood risk for communities.

Invest in extreme wildfire protection through the FY 2022 Budget. The FY 2022 President's Budget includes over $30 billion in FY 2022 to support wildfire management and related activities and disaster relief. This funding is necessary in order to ensure we have the resources necessary to better prepare and respond to wildfires and protect communities.

More effective treatment of hazardous fuels. This Administration understands the need to address forest management in the prevention of wildfires. The President's FY 2022 Budget has proposed a 62% increase in hazardous fuels funding across USFS and DOI. This funding is used to reduce wildfire hazards by addressing the excessive accumulation of biomass (i.e., "hazardous fuels") in targeted locations. Investments in FY 2022 will be informed by a scientific, outcome-based national investment model that targets land treatments to areas where they can be most effective in protecting communities. The USFS and DOI have identified more than 4 million acres that could be treated this year with the funding requested in the FY 2022 Budget. The Administration looks forward to working with Congress to fully fund this critical program.

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