

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT,
AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2013**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2012

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 9:34 a.m. in room SD-124, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed (chairman) presiding.

Present: Senators Reed, Feinstein, Johnson, Tester, and Murkowski.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE

STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL, CHIEF

**ACCOMPANIED BY SUSAN SPEAR, ACTING DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC
PLANNING BUDGET AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Good morning. I would like to welcome everyone to this hearing on the fiscal year 2013 budget request of the United States Forest Service (USFS).

And on behalf of the subcommittee, I would like to welcome Tom Tidwell, Chief of the USFS. Chief, thank you. And he is joined by Susan Spear. Thank you, Susan.

We appreciate you appearing before us to discuss the issues pertaining to the USFS.

As you may know, Rhode Island is not home to any national forest, yet. But the reality is that 55 percent of my State is actually forested land. It is in State or private ownership. That's a huge amount given we are the smallest State in the country, and also have the second-highest population density.

So, forests are important to every State, including Rhode Island. We recognize the USFS's main role is to maintain our national forests, but they also support outdoor recreation, habitat, access to open space in every State in the country, including Rhode Island.

Again, we thank you for your service, and believe it is important everywhere. And the hearing today is to ask you questions about your budget, and to see what we can do to provide you the resources necessary.

FISCAL YEAR 2013 BUDGET REQUEST

As I turn to this budget, I note that the administration's request for all USFS programs totals \$4.849 billion in new budget authority. That amount is \$255.1 million or a 5.6-percent increase more than the fiscal year 2012 enacted level.

What looks like a large increase though has to be put into perspective. It is important to note that this subcommittee provided an additional \$240 million in prior-year funding to cover firefighting needs for fiscal year 2012.

So on an apple-to-apples basis, that means that the administration's budget request is really only \$15 million more than the fiscal year 2012 level, well within the kind of request we've seen for other departments under our jurisdiction.

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

Overall, the requested funds will continue wildland fire management (WFM) programs at \$1.971 billion, a level that's essentially flat when compared to the fiscal year 2012 request. Within that amount, fire suppression's portion is fully funded at the 10-year rolling average of \$931 million.

USFS has also set aside \$24 million from within its fire program to begin building its next-generation airtanker fleet, an action that is long overdue and something that I hope we can discuss at greater length this morning.

NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM

The request includes \$1.62 billion for national forest system operations, an increase of \$69 million, or about 4 percent. Much of that increase is actually due to a major budget restructuring to create a \$793 million Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) program, a program which this subcommittee started as a pilot in fiscal year 2012, while the budget requests full funding. We will talk about whether the time is right for full funding or whether the pilot still has to be pursued.

This request also includes an 11-percent increase for land acquisition and Forest Legacy programs for a total of \$118 million. Funding for construction of roads, trails, and facilities is cut by 12 percent, for a total of \$334 million.

STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

And, finally, State and Private Forestry programs are slated to receive a 1-percent cut for a total of \$251 million.

The budget request includes a number of proposed changes to State Forestry Grants including a new \$18 million competition to fund landscape-scale restoration projects, which I also expect we will have a chance to discuss today.

I look forward to hearing a more in-depth discussion of these matters with you, Chief, and Ms. Spear, after you have had the opportunity to share your testimony.

With that, let me recognize and acknowledge my Ranking Member, Senator Murkowski. Senator.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning. And, Chief, good morning to you. Ms. Spear, welcome also.

Before I comment on a couple of concerns that I have with the USFS budget request, I would like to raise a recent court decision that I believe has the potential to severely hamper the ability of the USFS to get work done on the ground.

SEQUOIA FORESTKEEPER VS. TIDWELL

Chief, I think you clearly know what I'm talking about. On March 19, the Federal District Court in California found in *Sequoia ForestKeeper vs. Tidwell* that the USFS's use of categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) violates the Appeals Reform Act and enjoined the USFS from using these exclusions nationwide without providing for notice, comment, and appeal.

This will mean that simple, routine tasks that have no environmental impact will be subject to full notice, public comment, and appeal. I think we're already seeing some absurd consequences.

For example, Mr. Chairman, the USFS Web site lists a decision to replace a campground bathroom that is now subject to notice, comment, and appeal due to the *Sequoia ForestKeeper* case decision even though the USFS explicitly found that it will have no impact on the environment.

So if a project as routine as replacing a bathroom in a campground is now subject to appeal, it's hard for me to imagine any USFS action that some group could not appeal or delay. And, in a time of extremely tight resources, I think this will cause waste within the Agency.

We will lose enormous amounts of time. It will increase the costs of getting necessary work done, and it concerns me. I'm particularly concerned how this decision will affect activities on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION IMPACTS

In a local press account in the Juneau Empire earlier this month, the region 10 regional forester indicated that a categorical exclusion was used during the exploratory drilling process associated with Greens Creek.

And I hope that you'll be able to explain to me the impact that this court decision may have on mining activities on the Tongass National Forest, not only at Greens Creek, but at the Niblack and Bokan Projects as well.

I'm told that compliance with the court's order could add 140 days to the permitting process where categorical exclusions have been used. These added delays will have even more harmful impacts in Alaska where the field's season is shorter than it is in the lower 48.

I do hope, Chief, that you can assure me today that USFS plans to appeal the court's decision in *Sequoia ForestKeeper vs. Tidwell*, and that you're doing everything possible to mitigate the impacts of this decision.

INTEGRATED RESOURCE RESTORATION

Now, turning to the budget, I'm concerned that, once again, USFS is proposing to collapse several different budget activities, including timber, into one large pot called IRR.

This subcommittee explicitly rejected the same proposal last year and instead gave you the authority to pilot the concepts in regions 1, 3, and 4. The clear intent of the pilot was for USFS to prove that the concept had merit before the committee would consider it again.

At this point, I don't think we've got the information from these three regions that would provide for an informed judgment on the merits of the proposal.

There are many constituencies from the environmental community to industry that are skeptical of the big bucket approach to the budget, and I think that we need some clear data from the regions before we approve the consolidation of budget activities.

And I certainly understand the Agency's desire for flexibility. The Congress and the public require the accountability, and I'm concerned that we're going to lose that with this proposal.

AIRTANKER MODERNIZATION

I do applaud USFS for including \$24 million in its budget for modernization of the large airtanker fleet. However, I am troubled by the lack of specifics within the budget about how these funds are going to be spent.

Likewise, I appreciate that USFS issued a large airtanker modernization strategy, but again, I'm concerned about the lack of details. It does contain general description of several aircraft, but no indication of how and when the Agency intends to make its selection or whether it plans to purchase its own aircraft or continue to use the existing model of contracting for industry aircraft.

So I do hope that you can give us some additional details on USFS plan for this. Again, Chief, I welcome you and thank you for your service, and look forward for the opportunity for questions and answers here this morning.

Thank you.

PREPARED STATEMENT

Senator REED. Let me ask if any of my colleagues have opening statements. And, of course, all statements will be made part of the record. But if anyone wants to make statements now is the time to do so.

Also, I have been informed that Senator Blunt regrettably could not attend this hearing in person, but has submitted a prepared statement for the record.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR ROY BLUNT

Thank you, Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Murkowski, for holding this hearing today. I appreciate this opportunity to examine the budgetary needs of the United States Forest Service (USFS) in order to make sure taxpayer dollars are spent on programs that reflect our Nation's priorities.

Additionally, I would like to thank Chief Tidwell and Director Spear for being here today.

USFS manages more than 193 million acres of public land. The Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri represents a significant part of that mission. The Mark Twain National Forest consists of 1.5 million acres spanning 29 Missouri counties.

USFS announced that more than \$40 million would be dedicated to projects under the Land and Water Conversation Fund, including the Mark Twain National Forest. This includes almost \$1 million to connect existing national forest lands to the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, with the stated goals of protecting watershed quality and providing maximum benefit for both resident and migratory wildlife species.

While, of course, conservation activities with respect to forests are critical, I would hope that USFS focuses their efforts on the opportunity to increase harvest levels, without compromising forest health, and improve the Federal Government's return on its investment.

Over the last 5 years, annual saw timber harvests in the Mark Twain National Forest averaged about \$2.1 million for the 17.2 million board feet sold, according to Forest Industry and Analysis data.

However, timber sale proceeds cover only about 7 percent of the Mark Twain National Forest's annual budget of \$28 million.

With annual saw timber growth of more than 210 million board feet worth an estimated \$21,273,000, the National Forest System is missing a significant opportunity to capitalize on these resources.

I hope that USFS takes these types of considerations into account when allocating, spending, or establishing new management plans.

We need to both protect and utilize our natural resources to boost contributions to the GDP and create jobs. I look forward to your testimony, and thank you again for being here.

Senator REED. Senator Johnson.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR TIM JOHNSON

Senator JOHNSON. Yes. Thank you, Chairman Reed, and Senator Murkowski, for holding this hearing today. And thank you, Chief Tidwell and Ms. Spear for being here to discuss the administration's request for USFS.

I've appreciated your attention to forest health in South Dakota, and I look forward to continuing this discussion today in the context of the fiscal year 2013 budget. Thank you.

Senator REED. Senator Tester.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JON TESTER

Senator TESTER. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you holding the hearing, and along with the Ranking Member, once again, thanks for being here, Chief. And, Susan, thank you very much for both of your time and your service to this great country.

H.R. 1581

I just want to touch on one thing that you might be able to address in your opening statement. It deals with a bill in the House—H.R. 1581. It's a bill that, quite frankly, I think is a direct attack on our hunter and our fishermen in this country as far as access.

One of the huge assets we have in this country is our Federal lands, particularly in the West. And the ability to utilize those Federal lands in a way that makes sense is critically important.

What H.R. 1581 is going to do is release a lot of pristine, back-country land, good elk, good fisheries, just incredibly prized elk habitat and blue ribbon fisheries.

Montana has one of the highest percentage of hunters and anglers in the Nation and it amazes me that some over in the House want to take away these opportunities. They want to talk about

second amendment on the one hand, and in the other hand, take away the opportunity to use rifles in the wild.

I would like to have you address that, if you can, in your opening statement, on what USFS thinks about extreme proposals like H.R. 1581, and what you think we ought to do about it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both.

Senator REED. Thanks, Senator Tester. Chief Tidwell, please.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL

Mr. TIDWELL. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to be here to discuss the President's fiscal year 2013 budget request for the USFS.

I want to thank you for the support that we have received from this subcommittee in the past, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

The President's budget request, as you've already noted, reflects some very difficult choices we need to make to help reduce the deficit while investing in long-term economic growth and job creation.

Our budget request supports these priorities through three key objectives. The first is our focus on restoration. This budget request would restore and sustain another 2.6 million acres of forest and grasslands by increasing collaborative efforts and building support for restoration activities, which helps create thousands of jobs each year.

It requests full funding for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Fund that you gave us last year. We have been able to identify an additional 10 projects that are now moving forward because of what you were able to provide us in last year's budget. So I want to thank you for that.

The fiscal year 2013 budget also requests permanent authorization for stewardship contracting, which is an essential tool that we need to have available, along with our timber sale contracts, to be able to do this restoration work.

It also allows us to continue to apply the science, as developed by USFS research, to address the increasing frequency of forest disturbances. These range from longer fire seasons, record insect and disease outbreaks, and invasives to the floods and the droughts that we are experiencing.

INTEGRATED RESOURCE RESTORATION

The budget request proposes an IRR budget-line item to align our budget structure with the work. I know that we need to first demonstrate through our pilot and the pilot regions, that this approach will not only increase our productivity and efficiency but also for us to be able to show not only the outputs that will be produced, but also how the outcome of this is going to help us address the watershed conditions across all our lands.

Once again, I want to thank you for this pilot authority.

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

The second key objective with our budget request deals with WFM. It includes a level of preparedness that will continue our success in suppressing close to 98 percent of the wildland fires that

we take on during initial attack. It does request the 10-year average for suppression.

This is the area where you see a large increase, Mr. Chairman, as you have mentioned, in our budget request. It will also reduce the threat of wildfire to homes and communities by reducing hazardous fuels on a million acres in the wildland urban interface (WUI).

AIRTANKER MODERNIZATION

It does request an additional \$24 million to begin modernizing our large airtanker fleet. These funds will be used to pay for what we anticipate will be the additional contract costs to bring on what we call our next generation of large airtankers.

AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS INITIATIVE

The third objective is through the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, where we will increase support for community-based conservation. This enables us to continue to support recreational opportunities that improve on our quality of life, which we enjoy in this country, but it will also help maintain more than 223,000 jobs and about \$13 billion in annual spending by recreational visitors.

INCREASING EFFICIENCIES

It will help America to reconnect with the outdoors by increasing conservation education, volunteer opportunities, and increasing youth employment opportunities. We also request a slight increase in LWCF funding, in our Forest Legacy Program, to use conservation easements and land acquisition to protect critical forests and acquire public access while reducing our administrative costs of managing the national forests and grasslands.

We will continue to work together with our States to use both State and private funding programs to promote conservation and to help keep private forests forested.

We also encourage biomass utilization and other renewable energy opportunities while working to process oil and gas permit applications and energy transmission proposals more efficiently.

We also propose a framework for reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act, which I believe is vitally important to continue. Especially in these very difficult economic times that our counties and boroughs are currently facing.

PREPARED STATEMENT

We have also included some actions to increase our efficiencies. Over the next 2 years, between 2013 and 2014, we will reduce our overhead costs by more than \$100 million. This is an ongoing process of always looking at everything we do in order to increase our efficiencies; to make sure that we're doing everything that we can to get as much work done on the ground as possible through the appropriations.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TOM TIDWELL

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to be here today to discuss the President's budget request for the United States Forest Service (USFS) for fiscal year 2013. I appreciate the support this subcommittee has shown for USFS in the past, and I look forward to working together with members of the subcommittee in the future to ensure that stewardship of our Nation's forests and grasslands continues to meet the desires and expectations of the American people. I am confident that this budget will allow USFS to meet this goal while demonstrating both fiscal restraint and efficient, cost-effective spending.

Our Nation can and should take steps to reduce the deficit and make Government leaner and more efficient in the 21st century. The fiscal year 2013 budget that the President is proposing reflects the difficult choices we need to make to help reduce the deficit while investing in long-term economic growth and job creation. To make the strategic investments to grow the economy and tackle the deficit, this budget makes difficult cuts to programs. It also reflects efficiency and improvements to reduce our administrative costs. It is designed to appropriately fund programs that matter to Americans.

BUDGET CONTEXT

USFS manages 193 million acres of public lands on 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands in 44 States and Puerto Rico. We also work effectively with States, tribes, local governments, communities and private forest landowners to support the sustainable stewardship of the 423 million acres of private forest, 68 million acres of State forests, and 18 million acres of forestlands on Indian reservations in the United States. USFS management is based on peer-reviewed science; we lead the way for the Nation and, indeed, the world in cutting-edge research on a full range of conservation issues, including bioenergy, ecological restoration, wildland fire management (WFM), forest pests and diseases, and sustainable outdoor recreation.

Our mission is to work with the American people on all lands to sustain all the benefits needed and wanted from their forests and grasslands. For example, approximately 80 percent of the Nation's freshwater resources originate on forests, and Americans get more than one-half of their water supplies from sources that originate in the Nation's forests. USFS management, combined with assistance to private landowners, helps to protect the single greatest source of drinking water in the Nation.

Jobs are maintained and created through the work of USFS. Millions of Americans have forest-related jobs, from forest restoration work to recreation use, wood products, grazing, and energy and mineral development. In 2010, the National Forests attracted more than 170 million annual visitors, and recreation use, which alone sustained nearly 223,000 jobs while contributing \$14.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

Water and jobs are only some of the benefits Americans get from their forests and grasslands. These lands provide a whole range of ecosystem services— clean air, clean water, fertile soil that provides timber, forage, energy, food and fiber, fish and wildlife habitat, carbon storage, and opportunities for outdoor recreation just to name a few. These critical services to people are now at risk due to declining forest health, such as bark beetle infestation in the West. Regional drought, invasive species, loss of open space, catastrophic wildfires, devastating outbreaks of insects and disease, and the overarching challenge of a changing climate are degrading our Nation's natural infrastructure—the forests and grasslands that Americans depend on for so many services, values, and benefits.

By making targeted investments in the landscapes most at risk, we can restore healthy, resilient forests and grasslands, provide recreational and hunting access, and provide forest products for the benefit of all Americans. Our fiscal year 2013 budget request is designed to do just that by working with partners across borders and boundaries at a landscape level. Our focus on landscape-scale conservation dovetails with broader administration priorities, including the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative, the Secretary's "All-Lands" vision, and the Department's high-priority goal for enhancing water resources. Landscape-scale conservation is designed to maintain and enhance the resilience and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands through targeted investments in natural infrastructure. Our investments will put Americans back to work, maintaining and creating jobs and economic opportunities for both rural and urban Americans.

FISCAL YEAR 2013 BUDGET REQUEST AND PRIORITIES

The fiscal year 2013 President's budget requests \$4.86 billion for USFS, an increase of \$15.5 million more than the 2012 appropriated level. This budget responds to the public's desire for the conservation and stewardship of the Nation's forests and grasslands. Through strategic partnerships, we accomplish more work that yields benefits for all Americans, while sustaining forest and grassland ecosystems for future generations. In these tough economic times, this budget balances spending on priorities against reductions. It establishes spending on conservation principles and natural resource development needed by the public and for the Nation's economy. USFS managers will continue to scrutinize spending and programs to ensure the public's investment is used wisely toward safely achieving key outcomes and shared priorities.

USFS's fiscal year 2013 President's budget prioritizes USFS funding in three themes:

- restoration;
- communities; and
- fire.

Our priorities are designed to respond to the needs of the American public. The President's budget aligns with the Secretary's "All Lands" vision to meet the challenges of ecological restoration through collaborative approaches to address forest mortality and live tree density, invasive species and watershed degradation. The budget request will engage communities and help Americans reconnect to the outdoors, expand on recreation benefits and create a wide range of opportunities for economic expansion to retain and create jobs. The budget request also fosters partnering with communities and cooperating agencies to reduce the threat of wildland fires to people, property and watersheds.

RESTORATION THEME

With the current threats from insects and disease, wildfire, urban development, and impacts of a changing climate, active restoration is a key component of our fiscal year 2013 budget strategy. To achieve our restoration goals, we engage a broad set of partners in active forest management at large, landscape scales and apply peer-reviewed science related to forest disturbances, fire management, and the effects of a changing climate. Our restoration efforts are guided by a continuous cycle of assessing, implementing, and adapting based on information from inventory and monitoring efforts. This strategy will yield a variety of forest products and restore the structure, function, composition, and processes of healthy, resilient ecosystems across the Nation.

Restoration means jobs and economic opportunities. In order to maintain forest-related jobs we are requesting permanent authority for stewardship contracting. This authority allows the agency to accomplish collaborative restoration work at a landscape scale. Current authority for stewardship contracting expires in September 2013.

LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION PRIORITIES

Through active forest management, USFS is restoring ecosystem structure, functions, and processes in order to improve the health and resilience of ecosystems across large landscapes. Through the proposed Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) program, we expect to continue to collaborate using an inclusive process to find common ground across the many stakeholders and to leverage our investments for broader conservation impacts. IRR blends a cross-section of forest management activities, such as forest thinning to reduce hazardous fuels, decommissioning roads, and removal of fish passage barriers—all of which lead to improved forest and grassland health and watershed function. The Watershed Condition Framework, released in 2011, will help managers prioritize IRR activities. This framework provides a nationally consistent approach for classifying watershed conditions and allows us to track the number of watersheds that move to an improved condition in the long term.

In fiscal year 2011, we restored or enhanced more than 4.9 million acres of both public and private lands. We will continue to invest in and accomplish restoration on the ground. In fiscal year 2013, through IRR we propose to restore or sustain 2.6 million acres on National Forest System lands; provide 2.8 billion board feet of timber; decommission more than 2,000 miles of road; and restore or enhance 2,750 miles of stream habitat. By focusing on restoration outcomes, the IRR program empowers USFS managers and local communities to find the best, most-efficient way to meet their ecological, economic, and social objectives. For example, a landscape

thinning project may be accomplished under a combination of timber sales and stewardship contracts which reduces the threat of catastrophic wildfire, improves forest and watershed health and resilience, and removes unneeded erosion prone roads. These outcomes help reduce risk from threats like fire, insects, and diseases; provide clean, low-cost drinking water to communities; and maintain local infrastructure and jobs by creating economic opportunities such as uses for biomass and other forest products.

Our Forest Health Management program provides insect, disease, and invasive plant survey and monitoring information on forest health conditions on Federal and non-Federal (cooperative) lands and provides technical and financial assistance to prevent, suppress, and control outbreaks threatening forest resources and watershed conditions. Forest Health Management helps to implement the States' Forest Action Plans and focuses on the highest-priority areas and on high-priority pests, as identified by mapping and surveys. In fiscal year 2013, Forest Health Management will continue to utilize science, active land management, and technology transfer expertise to restore and sustain forest landscapes, across urban, private, State, tribal, and Federal forests, and create private sector jobs because of the expertise required to carry out this work.

The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program is a high-priority program that embodies our integrative, collaborative, landscape-scale restoration focus. In fiscal year 2011, Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects implemented treatments to restore ecosystem resilience and adaptive capacity while generating forest products to help support local infrastructure and economies. Forest vegetation was improved or established on more than 26,000 acres; 121 million board feet of timber was sold; and approximately 268,000 green tons of woody biomass was made available for biomass or bioenergy-related production. Cooperators played a substantial role in fiscal year 2011 by providing more than \$8 million in additional funding. The fiscal year 2013 request supports the community-based Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects chosen in fiscal year 2010 and fiscal year 2012. The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program is creating job stability by supplying a reliable wood and biomass supply for forest products and bioenergy production; improving forest health and wildlife habitat; and reducing fire suppression costs in overgrown forests.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

USFS houses the world's largest forestry research organization. We conduct research that develops new technologies and brings cutting-edge science to bear on the sustainable management of the Nation's forests and rangelands. Long-term research from our experimental forests and rangelands contributes to an understanding of the impacts of forest disturbance on the natural and cultural resources of U.S. landscapes. This knowledge assists public and private land managers in identifying strategies to mitigate and adapt to forest stressors. Rigorous, applied research is also key to supporting new and emerging markets with innovations that enhance and diversify the forest products industry. Private investment in the forestry sector relies on USFS research. Finally, our social science research is critical to appropriately aligning agency activities with society's values and priorities for the Nation's natural resources and public lands.

The proposed funding will maintain essential levels of research in our high-priority and strategic program areas to ensure that we develop, apply, and deliver new knowledge and technologies that support sustainable management objectives. One high-priority program is Forest Inventory and Analysis, which provides the resource data, analysis, and tools needed to assess current status and trends of forests; management options and impacts; and threats such as fire, insects, and disease. In fiscal year 2011, USFS's Research and Development deputy area implemented the Forest Inventory and Analysis annual forest sampling in all 50 States (though we have not been able to sample interior Alaska), providing accessible data for 96 percent of the Nation. The data provides important information for private forest landowners to use in developing management objectives for sustainable management of private forests. In fiscal year 2013, Forest Inventory and Analysis will continue in all 50 States and seven reports will be published.

PLANNING, MONITORING, AND ANALYSIS PRIORITIES

Restoration efforts are guided by a continuous cycle of assessment, project planning and implementation, and adaptation based on information from inventory and monitoring. Consistent with the USFS's priority of landscape-scale conservation, our proposed Planning Rule emphasizes a collaborative, science-based approach with broad-scale monitoring strategies at the regional and national level for the National

Forest System. USFS managers collaborate with a wide variety of stakeholders to consider all interests affected or influenced by land management planning and project level implementation decisions. We are integrating and improving monitoring databases to enhance efficiency and transparency. These monitoring data provide baseline information from which managers plan the mix of goods and services for individual national forests and frame objectives for planning and subsequent restoration activities. The data helps managers set conservation objectives to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the National Forest System.

This budget proposes consolidation of the Land Management Planning and Inventory and Monitoring programs to form the single, integrated program of Land Management Planning Assessments and Monitoring. This new budget structure highlights the connectedness of these activities under the proposed Planning Rule. High-priority resource issues include watershed and ecological conditions; habitat needs for a number of species; visitor use and recreation objectives; forest disturbances; and other local, regional and national objectives. USFS units completed 58 plan assessments in fiscal year 2011—an initial step for determining the need to revise or amend land management plans in response to changing ecological, social, and economic conditions.

COMMUNITIES THEME

Communities continue to be a priority for USFS in fiscal year 2013. We are committed to engaging communities across the Nation to reconnect with the outdoors, expand recreation benefits, and harness the many economic opportunities our land management activities create in a way that supports diverse employment in forest-dependent communities. As part of the President's fiscal year 2013 budget, we request reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 for 5 years. The fiscal year 2013 proposal supports rural communities through assuming enactment of the fiscal year 2012 President's proposed reauthorization through mandatory funding.

We continue to develop successful collaboration with municipalities, nongovernmental organizations, and private companies at many levels. Through approximately 7,800 grants and agreements in fiscal year 2011, we engaged a wide circle of partners in land management projects and activities, leveraging agency investment for an additional \$616 million in partner contributions. In fiscal year 2013, this collaboration will continue to expand recreation opportunities, reconnect people with the outdoors, and use land management activities to create employment and sustain communities. Our budget request includes proposed language that would authorize the Secretary to enter into agreements with interpretive associations (including scientific, historical, educational, and other societies, organizations, and associations) to enhance visitor awareness and knowledge of the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage, and to enhance and leverage our collective interpretive efforts. Based on our current efforts, we know that increasing collaboration with local communities can move conservation efforts from a scale of thousands of acres to hundreds of thousands of acres. The President's fiscal year 2013 budget strategically allocates resources to support exemplary local stewardship and collaboration models and to catalyze new partnerships and innovations.

LANDSCAPE-SCALE CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Restoration projects across broad Federal landscapes, such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, are not sufficient alone to address the restoration needs and challenges of today. USFS's approach to land management focuses on landscape-scale outcomes through cross-boundary landscape conservation. We consider current and desired resource conditions across all ownerships—putting national forests and grasslands in the broader social, economic, and ecological context of the entire landscapes. Considering the well-being of communities adjacent to national forests, as well as urban populations that depend on forest-derived ecosystem services such as water filtration, is a top priority.

In fiscal year 2011, our State and Private Forestry programs competitively allocated \$19.8 million to State Foresters, supporting 72 projects in 47 States. These allocations enable USFS to leverage more than \$21 million in partners dollars and in-kind contributions. In fiscal year 2013, we propose to build on the success of our recent redesign of State and Private Forestry by combining funds into a Landscape Scale Restoration Program to continue our work with the State Foresters and engage multiple landowners across boundaries. This program helps address challenges like forest fragmentation and the conversion of forestland due to urbanization and other land uses. Through competitive grants, it will implement innovative projects

that address the greatest threats to forest sustainability, as identified by States in their Forest Action Plans.

The Forest Legacy Program is an incentive-based approach that uses easements to permanently protect non-Federal forest lands vital for wildlife habitat and rural jobs. The focus is on forest lands at risk of conversion to other (non-forest) land uses. To date, more than 2 million forested acres have been protected from conversion, ensuring a robust natural infrastructure to support rural jobs in the forest sector.

Through Land Acquisition, we work to consolidate non-USFS properties within or adjacent to national forest boundaries. These acquisitions protect critical ecosystem connectivity, enhance visitor access, and reduce expenditures associated with boundary management and fire suppression. This request includes up to \$25 million for support of the Federal Interagency Collaborative Land and Water Conservation Fund Initiative. This interagency partnership with the Department of the Interior will guide acquisitions in support of objectives set by the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, achieving targeted, coordinated Federal acquisitions that are locally driven and supported by local governments. The request also includes up to \$5 million to acquire land to open up additional access for recreational purposes, specifically to increase priority recreation access to National Forest System lands. USFS will use the funds to acquire parcels that provide access to National Forest System lands whereby access is not currently available or is impeded.

Just as we recognize the importance of conserving working forest lands in rural areas, we also support the creation of community forests that connect urban populations to nearby outdoor areas. Through the Community Forest and Open Space Program, we fund cost-share (matching) grants for the acquisition of community forests that provide public recreation and watershed benefits. Such benefits include enhanced drinking water quality, wildlife habitat, forest management jobs, and opportunities for wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor experiences readily accessible to urban populations. In October 2011, USFS issued regulations to ensure a consistent and transparent program. We are in the process of soliciting applications to award the first projects.

RECREATION AND TRAILS PRIORITIES

USFS lands are a public treasure providing unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities. Population growth and loss of open spaces contribute to ever-greater demand for high-quality recreation opportunities. Annually, more than 170 million visitors enjoy activities such as camping, picnicking, skiing, fishing, and hunting. The Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness Program provides the interpretive, outreach and infrastructure needs vital to connecting Americans to the great outdoors.

In response to the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, we are improving recreational access and expanding opportunities for youth and diverse populations. The Youth Conservation Corps creates jobs, as do expanded opportunities for private sector outfitters, guides, ski areas, and resorts. Through the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation, we are implementing actions to eliminate redundancy and create seamless programs between the Federal agencies to increase recreation opportunities.

Our Trails program ensures public safety and backcountry access through the operation, maintenance, rehabilitation, and improvement of National Forest System trails, serving a wide constituency of visitors at a relatively low cost. In fiscal year 2013, we are prioritizing the designation of trails for motorized use, consistent with the Travel Management Rule. Our trail system also accommodates nonmotorized uses such as cross-country skiing, hiking, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and mountain biking. In fiscal year 2011, partners contributed approximately \$7 million and maintained almost 5,500 miles of national and scenic trails. Through strengthened partnerships in fiscal year 2013, we will emphasize trail stewardship activities and youth programs.

Our proposed legislative language to make permanent our authority on administration of rights-of-way and land uses would ensure timely customer service, reduce the potential liability to the United States associated with uses on National Forest System lands under an expired authorization, and enable us to accept new applications to expand our support for local and regional economies. Special uses enable a wide range of public services that support thousands of jobs, from large-scale energy and communication transmission to small-scale outfitters and guides. Processing these permit applications is time intensive and expensive. Recovered funds will remain at the local office of collection to enable more-timely service to permit holders and applicants. The existing authority expires on September 30, 2012.

USFS assists in developing and sustaining urban forest infrastructure within cities, as well as connecting urban residents—especially youth—to recreation experiences in national forests. With more than 83 percent of all Americans living in metropolitan areas, USFS Urban and Community Forestry Program supports the active management of forests and trees in more than 7,000 communities, reaching 194 million people in fiscal year 2011. This program seeks to optimize benefits from urban forests by planting trees for carbon sequestration and energy conservation objectives. USFS research and development helps to create more livable and desirable urban areas and improve urban ecosystem services, like cleaner city air and water, through leading science and new technology. In New York City, for example, USFS's iTree tool provided baseline information about trees that has been a critical foundation for the MillionTreesNYC campaign. The Conservation Education program—through initiatives like “Children’s Forests” and “More Kids in the Woods”—builds on both long-term and new partnerships. In fiscal year 2011, more than 5 million children and families participated in environmental education, recreation, and related literacy programs on public lands and waters, increasing their understanding of the natural world and its benefits.

FACILITIES AND ROADS MAINTENANCE PRIORITIES

Maintenance of physical infrastructure—including the best and safe use of over 40,200 buildings for administrative, recreation-related, and other uses, approximately 373,000 miles of roads (102,000 miles are closed, but provide options for future use) and 6,200 bridges—is an important priority in fulfilling USFS mission. Maintaining our facilities saves money over time and provides for safe, pleasurable, and accessible sites for the public’s enjoyment while recreating. In fiscal year 2013, strategic investments in facilities and infrastructure maintenance will reduce our agency’s environmental footprint and save money by lowering energy costs. This budget request proposes deferring new facilities construction when other cost-effective and reasonable options exist.

This budget request also prioritizes road maintenance to ensure we protect water quality, meet Highway Safety Act standards, and meet the need for motorized use, as identified on USFS motor vehicle use maps. We also emphasize replacing deficient bridges, upgrading stream crossings, and providing a transportation system to and from timber and stewardship project sites that support local jobs and our collaborative restoration priorities.

FIRE THEME

Our final priority for the fiscal year 2013 budget request reflects the President’s commitment to a responsible budget for WFM. We will continue to partner with States, communities, and other Federal agencies to maximize our suppression capabilities and support community efforts to reduce direct threats from wild fires.

Wildland fire is a natural and necessary component of restoring ecosystem resilience in fire-adapted ecosystems. In many places, drier conditions and longer fire seasons, along with invasive species like cheatgrass, have further altered the timing and pattern of fire, making fires bigger and harder to suppress. Addressing these challenges will reduce fire risk to communities and maintain and create jobs through activities that restore ecosystem resilience.

The cost and complexity of both fuels treatments to reduce fire risk and wildfire suppression have gone up due to growing numbers of housing developments adjacent to wildlands and other factors. In this context of more costly fire management, we continue to refine our use of decision-support tools. These tools help us allocate resources more efficiently and to adopt appropriate risk management principles. Further, we responded to the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act of 2009 by collaborating broadly to develop the new National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy. The strategy is designed to:

- Restore and maintain resilient landscapes at a regional and sub-regional scale;
- Create fire-adapted communities; and
- Respond to wildfire effectively through partnerships among local, State, tribal, and Federal fire organizations.

The Nation depends on USFS to take proactive measures to reduce the threat of wildfire. By working proactively to re-establish fire-adapted ecosystems, we can reduce the costs associated with catastrophic wildfire. The proposed budget for fiscal year 2013 would direct fire management resources toward the highest-priority areas while maximizing cost-effectiveness. We are ready to protect life, property and community, and public safety.

FUELS REDUCTION PRIORITIES

The Hazardous Fuels budget line item for fiscal year 2013 focuses on treatments in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and other high-priority areas with a target of 1 million acres vital to protecting lives, property and public infrastructure. The priority for these funds is in WUI communities that are working to achieve firewise standards, have demonstrated local investment, and that have developed a community wildfire protection plan. The agency will continue to emphasize the importance of community wildfire protection plans by prioritizing hazardous fuels treatments in WUI areas that are identified in these plans. This funding is also used for grants that encourage woody biomass utilization and to facilitate market development for the biomass removed from the landscape through fuels treatments.

Biomass for energy is an important byproduct of hazardous fuels reduction and restoration work. Currently one-quarter of all renewable energy consumption comes from wood. Biomass utilization is important because it helps diversify the forest products industry and creates new markets that ensure alternative uses for material that would otherwise be piled or burned at the treatment site. With active management, America's forests can sustainably supply woody biomass for fuels and high-value chemicals and help meet national energy, environmental, and employment goals.

In fiscal year 2013, USFS plans to reach out to municipal water providers and pursue additional investments to protect water supplies. For example, three of the five major Front Range water utilities (in Denver, Aurora, and Colorado Springs) have invested nearly \$34 million in forest thinning treatments to reduce wildfire risks. Our strategy is to attract investments from all Front Range cities and to substantially increase amounts invested by those cities and other partners through matching USFS funds.

The hazardous fuels management efforts compliment restoration activities conducted through Integrated Resource Restoration and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program to reduce fuels, restore forest landscapes, and protect communities. These projects leverage partner investments through innovative collaboration to restore landscape resilience across 50,000 acres or more. Contracted services for fuels reduction in core forest zones provide jobs, as do the forest products and woody biomass utilization activities that result from fuels removal and reduction.

PREPAREDNESS PRIORITIES

The second way we are responsibly addressing WFM with this budget request is through our preparedness program, which ensures the capability to protect life, property, and natural resources while assuring an appropriate, risk informed and effective response to wildfires, consistent with land and resource management objectives.

The preparedness program pre-positions resources as needed to ensure an appropriate, risk-informed, and effective wildfire response. This budget also includes \$24 million to pay for the increased costs of modernizing the firefighting large airtanker fleet. We are soliciting bids for modern airtankers to complement the remaining 11 in our fleet.

SUPPRESSION PRIORITIES

The suppression program combined with the FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund, meets the funding level at the 10-year average cost of suppression for fiscal year 2013. Wildland fires continue to be larger and more difficult to suppress due to many factors including longer fire seasons, fuel accumulation, and the increased size and complexity of housing developments adjacent to or in forested lands.

In fiscal year 2011, USFS contained more than 97 percent of the fires we managed during initial attack. Wildfire response decisionmaking is evolving based on risk-informed analysis that reduces exposure to wildland firefighters while ensuring that high-value resources are protected. The results of these decisions allow us to manage fires more cost-effectively while achieving agency land management objectives by enabling fire to play its natural role in restoring landscapes. For fiscal year 2013, the suppression, preparedness and FLAME budget request continues to emphasize our efforts related to strategic risk assessment and programs to improve wildland fire operational decisions and meet overriding objectives of maintaining public and firefighter safety. These efforts are expected to result in significant increases in the effective and efficient use of agency resources.

For the few fires that escaped initial attack, the percentage that exceeded expected containment costs fell from 39.7 percent in fiscal year 2010 to 20.8 percent in fiscal year 2011, a notable achievement in responsibly budgeting for fire suppression. Implementing the agency's broader restoration goals will lead to further progress. Given the highly variable nature of fire seasons from year to year, the FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund ensures our ability to cover the cost of large, complex fires that escape initial attack.

GAINING EFFICIENCIES AND COST CONTROL MEASURES

We must be efficient and effective in meeting our mission and delivering services to the American people. We have been gaining efficiencies and managing costs and our workforce to achieve our mission in the past and will continue to do so. We are making difficult choices to work better and leaner to live within constrained budgets. USFS's fiscal year 2012 target for cost savings is \$44 million. Reduced travel accounts for \$14 million of these savings. An additional \$30 million is achieved through new acquisition management procedures including the use of strategic sourcing, competitive and/or performance-based contracts, and ongoing training of contracting staff to better manage contracts.

Our efforts to gain efficiency in fiscal year 2012 and this fiscal year 2013 budget request focus on implementing the President's Executive order, "Promoting Efficient Spending". We identified reduced spending levels in travel, information technology, printing, fleet and promotional items. We have planned a \$100 million reduction in cost pools over the course of fiscal year 2013 and fiscal year 2014. We are also implementing the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Administrative Solutions Project to reduce redundancies and take advantage of existing resources across USDA. We will also continue our strategic investments in safety and cultural transformation for our employees. These efforts will enable employees to spend less time on operational functions and more time on priority work in a safe, healthy, and productive manner. We expect these efforts to result in costs savings in the future. We also estimate that our workforce will be reduced by nearly 1,500 full-time equivalents between fiscal year 2011 and fiscal year 2013. This level of reduction is within our average annual attrition rate. We will continue to manage our workforce and organizational changes to provide service at the local level.

CONCLUSION

USFS's fiscal year 2013 President's budget aligns with priorities set by the administration and USDA while balancing the need for fiscal restraint. The magnitude and urgency of forest restoration work, along with the demand for safe, accessible outdoor recreation opportunities, are growing in a context of declining budgets. This means that the agency will face unprecedented fiscal challenges in the next few years. USFS must act strategically and tackle fiscal challenges directly, focusing our resources on continuing to provide services and goods to the American public.

Through landscape-scale conservation, our three funding priorities of restoration, communities, and fire will pass on to future generations the water, wildlife habitat, renewable resources, scenic beauty, and other natural riches that Americans enjoy today from their forests and grasslands.

Mr. TIDWELL. Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for this opportunity to be here, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Chief. We will hear from Senator Feinstein. Senator Feinstein, do you want to make a brief comment, as our colleagues have, before we begin the questioning?

Senator FEINSTEIN. I would like to talk about firefighting, so I will wait my turn. Thank you very much.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Feinstein.

Again, Chief, thank you for not only your testimony today, but your leadership. We'll do 8-minute rounds, and I'll anticipate we will do at least two, for those who want to stay for the second round.

Senator Feinstein, Senator Murkowski, and I, all have mentioned the issue of fire suppression. One of the annual challenges we have is to ensure you have the appropriate resources to deal with fires.

You might begin by letting us know what your sense is for this fire season, given the weather, modeling and other data that you have, as to will you have the resources, do you expect a very challenging fire season this year?

FIRE SEASON 2012

Mr. TIDWELL. Mr. Chairman, our predictive services, when they put out their last report the first of April, indicates that we will have a fire season similar to what we had last year. That is based on getting some favorable weather that will continue to occur in the Northwestern part of the country and also through the Central part.

If that does not occur, then we anticipate that we will probably have a more active fire season than we did last year. We are prepared with the resources, the crews that are in place, the large helicopters, and we are moving forward with acquiring some additional large airtankers under contract, to better enable us to deal with this fire season.

A lot will depend on the weather. But we have already seen some very active fire behavior here in the East. We had the tragic fire out in Colorado just a few weeks ago in March. Today, we have a very large fire burning here in Virginia, on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. We have a Type 1 team that we have had to deploy under that fire today.

We are seeing an active fire season right now, and a lot will depend on how the weather develops over the next 30 to 60 days; that will determine just how difficult this season will be.

Senator REED. Thank you. Along with Senator Feinstein, I'm interested in your aircraft modernization program.

In February, you released a strategy, a large airtanker modernization strategy; there's been several strategies, but what we need is a plan. Specific numbers of aircraft, whether they'll be acquired, or they'll be leased. To what extent will you have to rely upon Air National Guard C130J's to supplement, or helicopter supplements.

Can you describe the plan you have in place, for this season, for the aircraft, the number you'll have available, the types of availability, and the adequacy of that plan?

AIRTANKER MODERNIZATION

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, our plan not only for this year but for the future is to move forward and acquire additional contracted aircraft. For this year, we expect to bring on three additional aircraft to supplement what we currently have. This will give us 14 large airtankers for this year.

We are also bringing on two water scoopers down from Alaska to augment the fleet down here, and we will also have one very large airtanker that will be available.

In addition to that, we have brought on some additional, Type 1 helicopters. These are helicopters that can carry almost as much water as the large airtankers can retardant.

They are very effective and a little more expensive, but we have brought on additional large helicopters for this year.

As we move forward, we expect to bring on 10 additional aircraft next year. These will all be contracted aircraft. This is what the \$24 million part of our request is for. We anticipate that the new aircraft will be a faster aircraft, and they will have a little larger capacity.

It will be a little more expensive than what our current costs are. We are going to need \$24 million to be able to cover the additional costs for probably up to an additional 13 planes next year.

For next year, I anticipate we are going to be in much better shape. This year, we are down and we will be down at least 4 large airtankers from what we had at the start of last season, but we are bringing on those additional large helicopters.

MODULAR AIRBORNE FIREFIGHTING SYSTEM

In addition to that, we will probably have to rely and depend on the Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) units again, like we did last year.

We have been using those MAFFS planes for 40 years. Even in the past when we had the large number of large airtankers we would often hit periods of time during an active fire season where we needed to rely on that additional capacity.

It works out very well because they are ready to go early in the season. They are ready to go late in the season, and we have continued to appreciate the partnership we have with those units. I can assure you that we are in constant communication to make sure that if those planes would not be available, that we would know about it ahead of time, and then we can make additional plans.

All indications are that those units are ready, and ready to fly when we need them. We will probably have to rely on those a little bit more than we have in the past.

Senator REED. My final question with respect to this issue of the aircraft is that I think the number in this year and next year is roughly 13?

Mr. TIDWELL. I expect we will probably have 14 this year.

Senator REED. Fourteen. But your long-term strategy calls for somewhere between 18 and 28.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator REED. So the obvious question is, how do we get from 14, let's say, to double that literally in the timeframe you're talking about with your strategy?

AIRTANKER LONG-TERM STRATEGY

Mr. TIDWELL. With the request for proposals that we put out a few months ago, we anticipate to bring on 3 additional aircraft this year, and then up to 10 additional aircraft next year. Those will all be contracted.

An ideal situation would be at this time next year, I would be reporting to you that we have 23 to 24 aircraft that are available for the 2013 fire season.

Senator REED. And that would be based on the \$24 million incremented funding?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator REED. Very good.

Just a final question I have, and I might revisit this one, and that's the integrated resource restoration.

You know, last year's appropriations bill provided the flexibility to conduct your pilot in three regions. This year's budget with full funding without essentially the results of the pilot, in a way, might be anticipating the results.

We would like to see the results. So, can you comment very briefly?

INTEGRATED RESOURCE RESTORATION

Mr. TIDWELL. Mr. Chairman, we will be sending up our plan that not only lays out how those funds are allocated, but how they will be used, and how they will be able to account for what is produced from those funds throughout the year.

At the end of the year, I look forward to when we can come up here and actually show what we have accomplished by having the flexibility that this fund affords.

I recognize that we need to first show you that this is a better way through the pilot. At the same time, I would not be proposing this if I did not think it was a better way, and if I did not have the confidence that we can demonstrate that this will be better.

So I understand I first need to prove it, and we will be doing that and I look forward to working with you.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just to follow on that, Chief. If I understand what you are saying, you are asking within this budget request for the full-on IRR proposal. And yet, you say you are not going to be in a position until the end of this year to basically be able to show the accomplishments.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So this is kind of a "trust me" moment. And I think you heard last year from this subcommittee that we were willing to move forward with the pilot, but we wanted to see step by step.

So, since we're in this "trust me" time, can you tell me how, whether or not, you've issued any guidance to the field on how to implement the authority, what performance measures you are using currently to evaluate the pilot, and then, how we'll be able to assess whether or not this pilot is actually more effective than how the regions operated under the current budget structure?

Can you give me a little bit more than just say, wait until the end of the year?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes, Senator.

INTEGRATED RESOURCE RESTORATION DIRECTION

As soon as the bill was passed, we sent out directions to the three pilot regions about how to move forward with using the Integrated Resource Restoration budget line item, and then allocated their percentage of those funds to those three regions.

At the same time, we laid out that they need to be able to track our accomplishments: the amount of timber that's harvested, the number of acres that are going to be restored, watershed conditions improved, the number of miles of stream that are restored, and the miles of road that are decommissioned.

In addition to that, we set up a watershed condition framework. We had taken every one of the watersheds across all of the national forests and grasslands, and developed criteria that puts them in a specific category so we know what their current condition is.

These three regions would then be able to track how they actually made a change and improved the condition in those watersheds in addition to the outputs that we will be tracking.

This will be part of the plan that we will have up here hopefully in the next few weeks to be able to share with you. Then, at the end of the year, to be able to come up here and show what work we were able to get done.

And then also to compare with what we have done in the past, in these same regions, with the same level of funding.

Senator MURKOWSKI. And I think we'll all look forward to seeing that plan when you bring it up then.

Let me ask you a little bit about this lawsuit out there, the *iSequoia ForestKeeper* decision that deals with the categorical exclusions.

As you heard in my opening comments, I think that this could have some considerable repercussions within the Agency. Can you tell me what the current legal status of the case is, and whether or not the USFS plans to appeal the decision?

SEQUOIA FORESTKEEPER VS. TIDWELL

Mr. TIDWELL. There have been numerous discussions with our attorneys about what the next course to look at this, and a decision has not been made on what is the next legal step to take.

Immediately though, we started looking at how we could move forward. We sent out direction to the field that for these projects that would be covered under a decision memo, we wanted them to go ahead and put out a 30-day notice, for notice and comment.

If we don't receive any substantive comments, then we can go ahead and move forward with the project. As you pointed out, that if we do, then we also have to allow for an appeal process that could easily delay these projects up to 140 days like you mentioned.

There are 600 of these projects that were ready to move forward in the next 90 days. Not only on some of the minimal operations that you mentioned in Alaska, but there are more than 200 associated with oil and gas operations, primarily in North Dakota.

More than 90 are hazardous fuel projects that we had planned to move forward with and do that work.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Is that 600 projects across the Nation then in all of these different areas? Whether it's oil and gas, mining, et cetera.

IMPACTED PROJECTS

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes. There are 600 total that were planned to go forward in the next 90 days. Of that 600, there are more than 200

that are associated with oil and gas operations, and more than 90 with hazardous fuels. There are at least six in Alaska, just dealing with mining activities.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So, will the USFS notify these permit holders and the contract holders if their operations next season are going to be delayed or cancelled because of this decision out there? How does that work?

Mr. TIDWELL. We will need to do that. I am optimistic that many of these projects, after the 30-day time limit for public notice and comment, will be able to go forward.

As you mentioned, the one project, I would assume that is one that after 30 days, we would not get any substantive comments on it, so we could just go forward with it.

Senator MURKOWSKI. But, we're assuming that that's going to be the case. We get lucky, basically?

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, I need to remain optimistic as much as I can on this. I do expect that there will be some, if not many of these projects that we will probably need to go through the appeal process on, and there will be significant delays.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, and you've been able to detail the number of projects. Do we have any estimate on the number of jobs that we're talking about, the number of different economic activities that could be potentially delayed or held up because of this? Have you done that kind of an assessment?

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Mr. TIDWELL. We have not done that yet. That is something we could pull together, especially for the projects because of our short field season in some parts of the country, that we would not be able to implement this year.

If we need to wait 30 days for notice and comment, that will not be a significant impact, and we will be able to move forward with those. We will track the potential job impacts, and we can get back to you on that.

PREDECISIONAL OBJECTION PROCESS

Senator MURKOWSKI. I'd appreciate that.

Now, last year, in the Interior, environment, and related agencies bill, section 428, we gave you the authority to promulgate regs, that use the Healthy Forest Act predecisional objection process instead of the process under which the Federal court found that you couldn't use the categorical exclusions.

So I guess the question to you is whether or not you plan to issue these kinds of regulations pursuant to section 428, and whether or not the issuance of these regulations through this section would be an opportunity to perhaps fix what we're dealing with with this court decision?

Mr. TIDWELL. First, we do plan to move forward with rule-making, to be able to use this predecisional objection process, that will actually be a better process. It allows us to have that additional discussion before the final decision is made.

It supports our collaborative efforts very well. Part of the legal discussion that has been going on is if it would also give us an op-

portunity to address the current court order to use common notice and appeals on categorical exclusions.

I am not sure if it will. It may not because the appropriations language was very specific to Environmental Assessments (EA) and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS), and it did not mention categorical exclusions. It is one of the things our attorneys are looking at, and we will have to get back to you on that.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. Can you update the Committee, the subcommittee, when you know?

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I think it is an area where we looked and said, okay, we might be able to get around this, this court decision, which I think you and I would both agree, has the potential to really snarl things up through a process.

And, if in fact, we have allowed for a fix last year, it would certainly seem to me that that would be one way to try to approach the problem. So, if you can just keep us current with that, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. TIDWELL. I will. I look at the predecisional objection process as really a better way. It still provides the opportunity, especially on EAs and EIS.

With categorical exclusions, because of the type of projects that we have to do I have already addressed all of the potential environmental impacts prior to using the categories.

Hopefully, we will be able to find a way forward with this so that those type of projects can move forward rather quickly.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator REED. Thank you very much.

We are following the early bird rule so I'll recognize Senator Tester and then Senator Feinstein.

Senator TESTER. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, once again, I want to thank both you, Chief, and Susan, for your service.

I want to flush out a little bit more about what the chairman talked about in his questioning about the planes. The number of planes has declined, with tankers from 43 in 2000 to 11 in 2011.

I've had the opportunity over the last year to be all over the West pretty extensively, and, of course, you know, I farm in Montana. So weather is something that I pay particular attention to, and I know that the snow pack is claimed to be average up in the high elevations. I don't know if that's true. I talked to a couple of ranchers this morning and said if there's a lot of snow up there, they haven't seen it.

So, the question becomes that sets us up for a pretty potentially big fire year. I know we do a lot of praying and we say, you know, if it's the same as last year, I mean, if we get decent rainfall, it could be the same as last year. And last year, at least in my neck of the woods, it was a pretty decent fire season from a cost standpoint.

You talked about going from 11 to 14 this year. There's three more tankers that you're going to contract for. When do you anticipate those contracts to be let?

AIRTANKER CONTRACTING

Mr. TIDWELL. Hopefully within the next 30 days, we will be able to make the decisions on the proposals that were submitted.

Senator TESTER. Okay.

Mr. TIDWELL. Then there will be a period of time that the aircraft will be able to demonstrate that they can meet our standards for retardant and delivery. We are optimistic that we will be able to bring on another three planes this year.

Senator TESTER. Okay. And I am familiar that you said that these planes are going to be faster so they're going to be a little more expensive, and I am familiar with what you're talking about.

The question becomes, is there an analysis to know if the delivery of the product onto the fire is more cost beneficial with these bigger, more expensive planes? Maybe not bigger, but faster planes.

AIRTANKER DELIVERY STUDIES

Mr. TIDWELL. The information we have from the studies that have been done is that if we have a larger payload, ideally up to around 3,000 gallons, and then deliver it in a way that penetrates the brush and the heavy timber like up in your country, that is the type of delivery system that we need.

Also, with the larger tank, they can split their loads and be able to drop two or maybe three from the same load. So that is where the efficiencies are gained.

We are also moving forward with a study to put additional equipment into these aircraft so that we will be able to collect more information about their effectiveness. Not only how often they hit right where the ground crew are requesting retardant, but how it was delivered.

By this time next year, we are going to have additional information that will help us as we move forward with determining just what is the right mix of aircraft. I want to stress that we are going to need a mix of aircraft. We are going to rely on our current contractors to keep delivering those resources.

We are going to need some additional contractors to come on-board to provide aircraft for us.

Senator TESTER. Okay. And because you talked about a mix, so I do want to talk about helicopters for a second. You said that it was potentially—well, maybe not potentially, I don't want to put words in your mouth—that there will be additional helicopters this year.

Could you tell me what that increase would be, and where we're at, and where it would be after the increase is done?

FIREFIGHTING HELICOPTERS

Mr. TIDWELL. We are contracting for four additional of the Type 1, which is what we call our heavy helicopter. Last year we had 26 of those, and then we had eight Type 2s that were available for really large fires.

In addition, there is another 90 helicopters that are available for initial attack. By going with four more of the large helicopters, it gives us more capacity than what we had last year.

However, there are additional costs. We had to put another \$4 million into those contracts just to start the season.

Senator TESTER. Okay. So and I know you're going to say, just fine, but can you tell me how confident you are between the airtankers and the helicopters that will be available to shut the unwanted fires down when they occur in a timely basis and effectively deal with the other ones as your management plan dictates?

FIREFIGHTING ASSET CONFIDENCE

Mr. TIDWELL. I have a lot of confidence in our firefighters ability to do the job and the mix of resources. I acknowledge we are short of large airtankers. I would feel much more comfortable if we had another four, five, or six of those available this year.

We will probably be quick to call on the MAFFS units to bring on those additional aircraft. With the MAFFS units, we will be well prepared to be able to deal with this fire season.

However, if it becomes much more active than what we currently predict, which it could, there will be times like in years past, when there will be a shortage of resources in the near term during initial attack. And we will have to deal with that just like we have had to in the past.

Senator TESTER. Are you familiar, I talked about a team with H.R. 1581? It appears to me that at a time where you guys are trying to get some stewardship stuff done, I think you've got about a \$6 billion backlog in roads as it is, that we're going exactly in the wrong direction.

Hunter and fishermen interests aside, we're going exactly in the wrong direction for what you guys are trying to get accomplished. Has the Department taken a stand on H.R. 1581 and its impact on outdoor activities?

H.R. 1581

Mr. TIDWELL. I don't have a position on that bill yet. I can tell you that there is very strong support to maintain the undeveloped character of our back country, the roadless areas in this country, to provide recreational benefits, clean water, and wildlife benefits that come out of that land.

What I want to focus on is being able to address the restoration needs and the millions of other acres, the roaded part of our country. It is often adjacent to our communities, that we need to restore, to make these areas much more resilient to fires, insects, and disease.

You mentioned our road backlog. There are many places in the country—because of the erosion—that are coming off of the road system, it is limiting some of our management options.

If we could ever get on top of that to the point where we could eliminate those concerns, it would free up and give us more flexibility to do restoration work and the timber harvest that needs to be done on these lands.

Senator TESTER. I agree.

Very quickly. Region 1 has been honored to have the regional forester become the chief or the deputy chief in the USFS. You, in fact, yourself, made this jump.

We have had now four regional foresters leave the region in the last decade and they've been darn good people. You're one of them.

The management and oversight, continuity in that region takes a hit because of that. We are in kind of, between a rock and a hard place, so to speak, because although we'd love to have the regional forester become the person in your position, it does impact continuity.

What steps since Leslie has left are you taking to get a new Director and are you concerned about the continuity in region 1, being intimately familiar with that region, as I am?

REGION 1

Mr. TIDWELL. I am with every region and every station whenever we have a change in leadership. I am very pleased with the work that the regional foresters have been doing for us.

I can assure you that the next regional forester, who I can at least say will do a better job than I did—I will not say she did a better job than the last one.

I will say that the next person will do a better job than I did up there for you.

Senator TESTER. How about the length, the continuity?

Mr. TIDWELL. I would hope in the future that our regional foresters can stay in place a little bit longer than at least the last couple have stayed up there.

I can assure you that the people that will be stepping into those positions have the experience, they have decades of experience in dealing with these resources. When they do step in, they will be ready to go and will be able to continue to provide the leadership that is necessary in our regions.

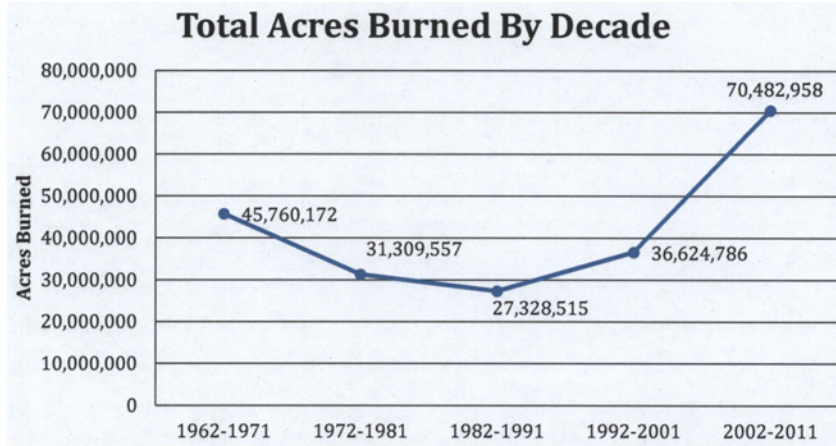
Senator TESTER. I appreciate that. They have been top flight, I agree. Thank you.

Senator REED. Senator Feinstein.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

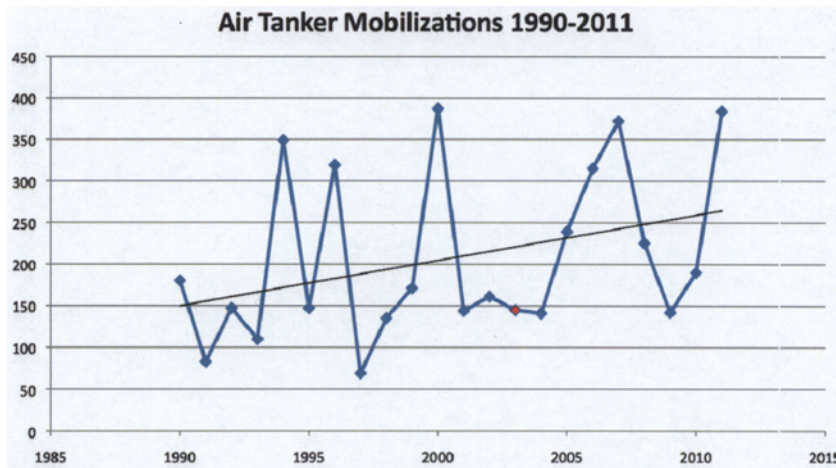
Mr. Tidwell, you know, I think we're all really very concerned about what's happening. The President's budget for you is up about 1 percent. And yet, I want to show you fires.

Here are "Total Acres Burned By Decade". And you can see from 2002 to 2011, 70,482,958 acres.

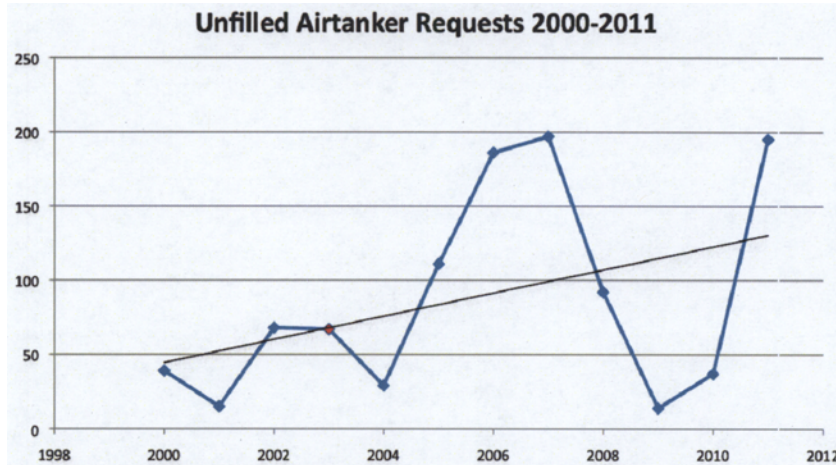


So you can see, there was a decline, 1982 to 1991, and from that point on, acreage burned has gone up. Here are the numbers of times planes were used.

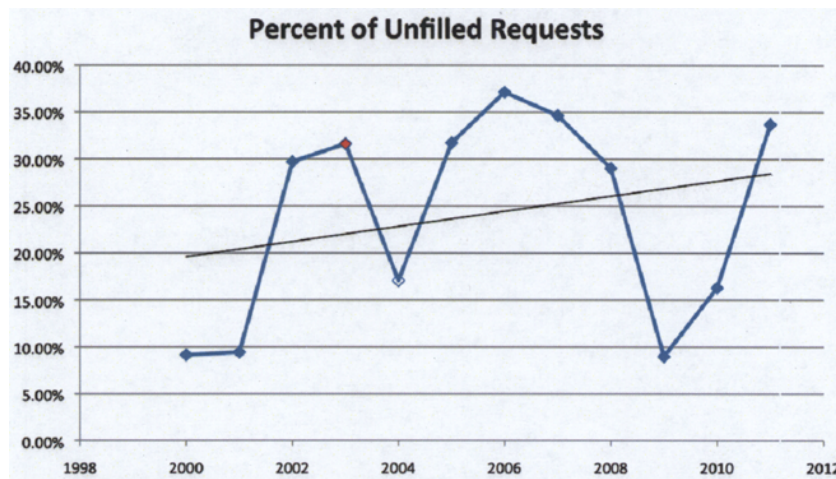
Do we have the one on planes? Could we put that up?



Shows the total number of times airtankers were used between 1990 and 2011.



Shows the number of times a request for a tanker was not filled.



The percentage of unfiled requests compared to the sum of filled and unfiled requests.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Oh, the number of times planes were used. And you see the line going straight up. So we have more acres burned, more need for planes. And I want my staff to bring you down a copy of a letter that you received on March 7 from CAL FIRE. I don't know if you have that in front of you.
 [The information follows:]

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY,
 DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION,
 Sacramento, CA, March 7, 2012.

The Honorable TOM TIDWELL,
 Chief, USDA Forest Service,
 Washington, DC.

DEAR CHIEF TIDWELL: The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) Region 5 have a long history of cooperative fire protection, including an integrated air attack program. Air attack bases were located throughout the State based on a maximum 20 minute response time to any location, including both State Responsibility Area (SRA) and National Forest lands. CAL FIRE's fleet of 23-Type 3 airtankers, mixed with the assigned Federal Type 1 airtankers, provided a mixture of aircraft to meet our joint initial attack goals, as well as the needs of extended attack and major fires.

The reduction in the number of Federal airtankers from 43 in 2000, to 11 in 2011, has resulted in significant impacts on this integrated system, placing an increasing burden on CAL FIRE aircraft to respond to fires on National Forest lands. Initial and extended attack fires on Federal lands are increasing the flight hours on CAL FIRE's airtankers and reducing their availability for response to new fires.

The USDA Forest Service Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy (Strategy), released on February 10, 2012, is long overdue and is a critical step toward identifying the next-generation large airtanker platform. I have concerns, however, that the Strategy falls short in several areas:

- The Strategy does not reference the individual needs of the States. The Federal aviation program is critical to meeting the fire protection goals of the States as well as those of the Federal agencies, especially in California. Fire fighting aircraft are a very limited resource and, therefore, it is critical that the national strategy include collaboration with the States to ensure the plan provides for efficient and integrated use of all assets.
- The identified optimum number of 18 to 28 aircraft is insufficient to meet the needs of the combined Federal, state and local wild land firefighting missions. As the Strategy indicates, the current drought cycle will continue through the next decade, only exacerbating the already dry fuel conditions and potential for extreme fire behavior. Over half of California's most devastating fires have occurred within the last 10 years. The Federal aviation program must build capacity back to a level that adequately supports the initial and extended attack needs, both nationally and within individual states. I am concerned that during periods of multiple large fires in other Regions, California will be left with an insufficient number of Federal aircraft to meet the normal initial and extended attack workload. This places additional burden on CAL FIRE and local government aircraft and risks additional large fires that threaten lives and natural resources.
- The Strategy identifies a desire to look at dual mission aircraft that can transition from delivering retardant to transporting cargo or fire fighters. It is critical that aircraft identified as airtankers remain dedicated to initial attack response and that retardant systems be designed for the most effective delivery and application of retardant. Switching between multiple functions often leads to a reduction in performance for any given task.
- The Strategy does not adequately address the potential use of very large airtankers (VLATs), especially for the extended attack incidents. The VLAT should be considered to meet your interim needs, and as part of your long-term strategy. Use of the VLAT on extended attack incidents, where large amounts of retardant are required over extended periods of time, could free up other airtankers for initial attack incidents where they are arguably more effective.

CAL FIRE has maintained its own aviation program in California for many years and has worked very closely with our Federal partners. We have a vested interest in an effective national aviation program that supports all of our missions. Unless there are a sufficient number of Federal airtankers, CAL FIRE cannot continue to support extended attack fires on Federal lands without adversely affecting our aviation program.

States stand ready to assist you in developing and implementing a plan for the appropriate number, type and location of Federal airtankers. I look forward to discussing this issue with you and Tom Harbour in the near future.

Sincerely,

KEN PIMLOTT,
 Director.

cc: (USFS) James Hubbard, Deputy Chief for State & Private Forestry
 (USFS) Tom Harbour, Director of Fire and Aviation Management
 (USFS) Randy Moore, Regional Forester Pacific Southwest Region
 (CAL FIRE) Andy McMurry, Deputy Director, Chief of Fire Protection
 (CAL FIRE) Caroline Godkin, Deputy Director of Legislation

FIREFIGHTING CAPACITY

Mr. TIDWELL. I do, Senator.

Senator FEINSTEIN. You do.

I've underlined certain parts of it, and I'd like you to follow along. Well, CAL FIRE's fleet of 23 Type 3 airtankers mixed with the assigned Federal type 1 airtankers provide a mixture of aircraft to meet our joint, initial attack goals, as well as the needs of extended attack on major fires.

And then he points out what the reductions are. And he says, initial and extended attack fires on Federal lands are increasing the flight hours on CAL FIRE's airtankers and reducing their availability for response to new fires. And then he talks about your strategy.

I have concern that the strategy falls short in several areas. And the one I would talk of the identified optimum number of 18 to 28 aircraft is insufficient to meet the needs of the combined Federal, State, and local wildland firefighting missions. The current drought cycle will continue through the next decade.

I'm concerned that during periods of multiple large fires in other regions, California will be left with an insufficient number of Federal aircraft to meet the normal initial and extended attack workload.

Now, here's the deal breaker. Unless there are a sufficient number of Federal airtankers, CAL FIRE cannot continue to support extended attack fires on Federal lands without adversely affecting our aviation program.

So what this is saying is if you're going to provide, you know, reduced ability, CAL FIRE is considering stopping fighting fires on Federal land, and we have huge amounts of Federal land in California.

Where do the new helos come from? You're cancelling four helos, three of them in California, is that right?

FIREFIGHTING HELICOPTERS

Mr. TIDWELL. Those were the smaller Type 2 helicopters.

Senator FEINSTEIN. But you're cancelling four, right?

Mr. TIDWELL. We replaced those. We actually have eight less of the Type 2 helicopters, and we are bringing on four Type 1s which actually will carry more, have more capacity, and are able to deliver more water per hour than those eight.

Senator FEINSTEIN. How many will be available during fire season in California?

Mr. TIDWELL. Depending on what's going on in California, Type 1 helicopters could be in California.

We move these resources to where the fire season is starting to increase, and we pre-position these large helicopters to be available.

They are not the helicopters that we rely on for initial attack. These are large helicopters that are dedicated to fire suppression,

the large fires. And so we will move those and pre-position them wherever in the country we need them.

Senator FEINSTEIN. You're staying that 30 of these helicopters will be available in California during fire season?

HELICOPTER POSITIONING

Mr. TIDWELL. They could be, depending on what's going on in California, and the rest of the country.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Could be.

Mr. TIDWELL. We also have our initial attack helicopters that will be located throughout the State. This is one of the things that we are also looking at, especially as the fire season develops. If we need to bring on additional helicopters over the next 30 to 45 days.

It is one of the things we are considering, to actually bring on some additional helicopters depending on how this fire season develops over the next 30 to 45 days.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Well, I'm concerned because I know CAL FIRE, and they don't say things that they don't mean. And I'm worried that we're on our way to a confrontation which is not going to be helpful.

And, you know, we've got big national forests up in the Tahoe Basin, up in the northern part of the State. You've got the Los Angeles National Forest where if they have a fire there, it impacts subdivisions and a lot of forestry land as well, different forest land.

That you will not have adequate equipment available in the State. You are saying to me that you will, is that right?

Mr. TIDWELL. We will be able to move these resources to California depending on the fire season. If we determine in the next 30 to 45 days that there's a need to bring on additional helicopters, we will do that.

We also have the hundreds of call-when-needed helicopters that we can also bring on.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Are they adequate? Is the supply going to be adequate? Look, hazardous fuels mitigation money is down. We have had a wet winter. You're going to have huge food for fire.

And if what happens with weather is more heat which is suspected, we've got two nuclear power plants down in Southern California, the possibility of rolling blackouts in the summer.

What I'm trying to find out is, will you make a commitment that there are adequate Federal firefighting resources for Federal land in California this next firefighting season?

Mr. TIDWELL. I will make a commitment that we will provide the resources that we have available to address the situation.

I would like to remind the subcommittee that there are times when we have the large airtankers, the large helicopters, the Type 1 crews that are within minutes of a fire.

If it gets started under certain conditions, we are not able to catch that fire during initial attack.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Well, my understanding is that the helos are not available to hit fires when they're small, only after they burn out of control; is that correct?

FIREFIGHTING WITH HELICOPTERS

Mr. TIDWELL. No. Our helitack crews, their primarily responsibility is initial attack. We have more than 90 helicopters that are just available for initial attack.

As the fire season develops, we can bring on dozens to 100 more on-call helicopters when needed to do initial attack, to drop water and also move crews.

Senator FEINSTEIN. I don't want to go through another Station Fire.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator FEINSTEIN. And you're telling me now that the helicopters will be available on the initiation of what could be a big fire. You're not going to wait until it's out of control.

Mr. TIDWELL. No. Usually, depending if the fire starts near one of our helitack bases, that helicopter is the first resource on the fire.

If it is farther away, then it is the airtanker that is going to be the first resource on the fire, and then the helicopters are usually the second resource on that fire.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Is it your intention in a wildfire, wildland fire on Federal land, to let the land burn or to attack it at its beginning? What is the policy now?

WILDLAND FIRE POLICY

Mr. TIDWELL. The policy is that when we need to take initial attack, we are going to take initial attack. Our record of being successful on close to 98 percent of the fires that we take initial attack on has held up over the years. I expect we are going to be able to continue that.

There are fires in the back country, where the planning has been completed. If we have the right set of conditions, we will manage that fire in the back country for resource benefits.

But when I say it is managed, it is still suppression actions that are taken to make sure that it is contained within an area that has been basically already addressed through a planning process.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Well, I'm going to follow this fire season very carefully and come back and look at this transcript. Because I am really concerned. And I hope you will give California some attention.

Things are happening weather-wise out there which are very serious, and it's getting warmer, and drier. And as I say, I think the decision was made in the Station Fire, not to attack early. And I think that was a mistake.

Initially, we had more than 1,000 lightning strikes on a given day up north, not last year, but a couple of years ago, which started hundreds of wildfires. And I went with President Bush and flew over and the damage that was done was just enormous. It looked like another planet.

STATION FIRE

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes, Senator, I worked in that region, and I was up there on those fires when we had that. I think it was one storm,

we had more than 3,000 fires get started there in the northern part of California.

We will continue to work very closely with CAL FIRE along with all the other States. The only way we can deal with wildland fire in this country is for all the cooperators to work together. We will take initial attack, like we did on the Station Fire. We had crews and resources that were on that fire right from the start. Early the next morning, we had a large helicopter dropping close to 2,000 gallons of water every few minutes on that fire.

But you get the right set of conditions, and you get the wind behind it, and there are a few of these that we are just not able to catch during initial attack.

Senator FEINSTEIN. I know that that's true. Have you responded to CAL FIRE's letter of March 7?

Mr. TIDWELL. We have been working with them, having discussions with them, and I will be sending a written response.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Would you please "cc" me on the response, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. TIDWELL. Certainly, Senator.

Senator FEINSTEIN. I'd appreciate it. Thank you. I'm sorry I took so much time.

Senator REED. Quite all right, Senator.

Senator FEINSTEIN. Thank you.

Senator REED. Very important and timely questions. In fact, let me just follow up.

As Senator Feinstein pointed out, not only do we look at a very complicated and challenging fire season ahead, we lost a lot of acreage last year which raises a question about rehabilitation.

And I note, and you may correct me if I'm inaccurate, that there's no line item for rehabilitation in the fiscal year 2012 budget, so how are you rehabilitating some of the lands? Where are you getting the money?

LAND REHABILITATION

Mr. TIDWELL. Mr. Chairman, you are correct. We no longer have the budget line item that we have had in the past to deal with restoration following a fire.

So the initial work that is done is through our burn area emergency rehab work, where we do have current year funds that we can use, but a lot of the work has to be done following that.

We will have to rely on using the funds—the fund codes that make up the IRR proposed line item.

We use force management of watershed funds, fish and wildlife funds at times, to be able to do that work. We are going to have less resources to be able to respond in the future.

Senator REED. Let me follow up with a related question. One of the ways that you try to minimize the risk is hazardous fuels reduction. And I looked at the fiscal year 2012 budget, and in the 2013 budget proposal, you are taking \$75 million from hazardous fuels, and you're putting it in the IRR line which we both talked about as perhaps the cart before the horse in terms of the pilot program.

That raises the question of how are you using these limited dollars for fuel reduction mitigation efforts that will help?

HAZARDOUS FUELS

Mr. TIDWELL. The \$75 million that we proposed to put into the IRR is basically that part of our hazardous fuel money that we have been spending in more of the back country to do the work.

Over the years, we have spent the majority of our funds in the WUI. We have 25 million acres of WUI on the National Forest and grasslands.

We have a system that we have been using for the past years, a model that we follow, to determine the highest-priority areas for distributing fuels funding across the country.

We follow that model to set the priorities and the allocations out to the regions, and the regions then use a similar model to actually determine which forest receives the hazardous fuels funding so that we are putting the funding where we have the highest priority.

Often when there are resources like communities that are at risk from a large wildfire those projects are going to rate out very high. That is why you are going to see us continue to spend the majority of our appropriations dealing with WUI hazardous fuels projects.

They are also the most expensive work. The work we do in the back country, we can treat a lot more acres for a lot less money. So over the last few years, as far as acre accomplishment, we have been getting about 50 percent of our accomplishment in the WUI, and then 50 percent in the back country, even though we have been spending the majority of our appropriated funds in the WUI.

It is just much more expensive to work in communities' backyards.

Senator REED. Yes. You presumably have evaluated the cost benefit, you know, the relative efficiency of this program. Can you share that with us? Whatever analysis you have.

Mr. TIDWELL. We can do that. I can tell you that we continue to learn. We had last year with the Wallow Fire, the largest wildfire of record in Arizona.

We were fortunate that a few years ago, we started the White Mountain Stewardship Project down there that had treated thousands of acres before that fire got started.

Because of that work, when that large wildfire hit those treated areas, areas that had been thinned out, that fire dropped out of the top of the trees onto the ground, and our suppression crews, our firefighters were successful.

It saved thousands of homes. It is tragic that we lost dozens, but because of that work, I would be glad to show you some photos that demonstrate the difference it can make.

We have also learned with the fire seasons we are dealing with now, that we need larger treatments. Some of the work that we did in the past was not large enough. We have to be able to understand that these wildfires, the conditions that we have today, that it is going to take much larger areas that have been treated to really make a difference.

Those are some of the things that we are looking at more now as we move forward. Taking more of a landscape approach so that we are not treating 50 acres or 100 acres. We need to be treating the thousands, the tens of thousands of acres.

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE FOREST RESTORATION PROJECTS

That is our current approach with these Collaborative Landscape Forest Restoration projects across the country. I used the one project down there in Arizona that we are moving forward with as an example.

We are also doing another one, an environmental impact study on 750,000 acres, to be able to address, do the analysis for 750,000 acres under one environmental document. Then we will be able to move forward and do the restoration work across this four-forest area over the next decade or so.

That is what we need to do. That is what we have been learning, and I will be glad to provide you with the information that we have on some of the studies we have been doing on the effectiveness.

Senator REED. Let me turn now to the urban and community forest program. You are looking at a \$3.2 million reduction, and yet you are indicating that you'll maintain the same level of activity.

That would be very good. How do you do that?

LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, actually, our request is very similar to what we received in fiscal year 2012. But there is a portion of those funds that have moved into our Landscape Scale Restoration proposed budget line item.

This Landscape Scale Restoration proposed budget line item reflects what we have been doing over the last few years. Taking a portion of our State and private funds and setting it aside, so that the States actually compete for those funds.

They get their initial funding, and then there is this other pot of money that we have had them compete for over the last few years. What we have noticed through this is that they have learned to look at how they can put together better proposals, even working across State lines, so that we have been able to increase our efficiency.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY

When it comes to Urban and Community Forestry, we are requesting a similar amount of money. There is just a portion of it that will be in this other proposed line item that the States will have to compete for just like they have had to over the last few years.

Senator REED. There's another aspect here, and that is with respect to States, particular States that don't have large national forests but have private and State owned forests.

That's the proposal to consolidate the State Wildland Fire Assistance and the Forest Health Management Program, which could leave some States, one of which being mine, unsure of where they stand or not receiving adequate resources for current programs.

Can you comment upon that?

PROGRAM CONSOLIDATION

Mr. TIDWELL. There is a very slight decrease in what is available for the State Fire Assistance funds.

Once again, we have proposed to put both of the funds into one budget line item just to make it a little easier for us to track just one budget line item.

It is going to be a little easier for the States, instead of having two. Basically, they have done the same type of work, and we feel that it's more efficient to have one budget line item.

Overall, it is a slight decrease from what we requested, what we received in fiscal year 2012. Those funds are still going to be available for Rhode Island and for all the States.

As it has been pointed out so clearly here a couple of times, our fire seasons are becoming not only longer, but more severe, and are becoming a bigger problem for us to deal with. It is essential that we can continue to be able to provide the support to our States and to local fire departments.

Without them, we would not have near the success ratio that we currently do, because we rely on both the State and the local fire department to be the first resources that come onto fires that are on the national forests.

Senator REED. Thank you, Chief. Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chief, let me ask you about the 9th Circuit, Court of Appeals decision that decided that forest roads are point sources that require industrial discharge permits.

Last year in the appropriations bill, language was included that temporarily prevented this ruling from taking place. So the question to you this morning is whether or not insertion of that language actually allowed USFS to get more work done on the ground?

Was that helpful, not helpful? Can you just kind of speak to how that played out?

FOREST ROADS

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, it allowed us to continue to do what we have been doing to address the need for clean water, and that is to follow the use of our best management practices that we have been relying on to address any potential concerns of erosion coming off of logging roads.

It's something we're working closely with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as we move forward. They had a court order they had to address. But to be able to work with them to find a way we can continue to use our best management practices to be able to apply that.

Because it has proven to be very effective not only on the national forests but also on the private forested lands, that most I think every State requires the use of best management practices.

And they have been effective to address, the potential concerns and be able to not only meet the intent of the Clean Water Act, but also to address any concerns with the impacts to water.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So if in fact this is actually helped you, is there a reason that you didn't request extension of this authority in the budget this year?

You mentioned you are working with EPA. We understand that we need to do that. But if it's proven effective, why wouldn't we want to continue this?

Mr. TIDWELL. I'm optimistic that through the work of EPA, we will be able to find an administrative path forward to be able to address this. I am optimistic we will be able to get that done.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Can you give me any indication at this point in time that you think you have that administrative authority?

Mr. TIDWELL. We do not have it at this point in time, but we are continuing to work closely with the EPA.

I would be glad to, as those discussions move forward, and a decision is made by the EPA on what steps they are going to take, provide that information to you.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. I would appreciate that because if it appears that that isn't possible, if you've indicated that you think you've actually made some improvements, you've been able to get some additional work done on the ground, then maybe we need to look again to inserting that language.

Let me ask you about Secure Rural Schools program. You mentioned very briefly in your statement a reference to Secure Rural Schools program. Clearly very important to States like mine and to many on this panel.

Can you tell me what the allocation split is? I'm looking at the budget justification here. And it just indicates that, let's see, the fiscal year 2012 proposal assumes the enactment of Secure Rural Schools program for 5 years, funds payments for mandatory funding.

And the proposal revises the allocation split between the schools and roads, economic investment, forest restoration, and fire assistance portions of the program.

Can you tell me where you are going to the Secure Rural Schools program?

SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Mr. TIDWELL. In the President's request, we identified mandatory funding that could be used for this program.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So where did you identify that from?

Mr. TIDWELL. It is part of the President's budget request.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay.

Mr. TIDWELL. It is the overall request, and at the same time, we need to work with you to put together the legislative framework on how to move forward with this program.

We put it in there as mandatory funding this year, it shows the importance, the understanding of the importance of this program, especially in these current economic times, about how we need to be able to find a way to work together to be able to move forward, to be able to continue to provide this funding to the counties and the boroughs.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. Well, I want to understand a little bit further the administration's proposal.

Again, this is something that many of us are very focused on, and want to make sure that we've got the funding piece of it figured out, but also the formula going forward over the 5 year proposal.

Let me ask you about the new forest planning rule. On the 23d of March, you finalized the new planning rule. This is the latest attempt to revise the 1982 planning rule.

Of course, we've seen a series of litigation over the years. The 1982 rule remains in effect. I guess a question to you is whether or not you also similarly expect that this new rule will be challenged and whether you think that this one is one that could actually be held up in a court challenge?

PLANNING RULE

Mr. TIDWELL. Senator, I do not know if it is going to be challenged or not. As you mentioned, we have had to deal with this for the last two decades, and the last three attempts were challenged.

We definitely have learned from those previous attempts. From my perspective, we have done the best job of having a very transparent process involving and engaging more members of the public across this country than we ever did before.

To be able to factor in what we heard from all those different meetings, and all the comments that we received, I believe we have the best proposal we have ever put together. It is very balanced. It will save money. It is going to save time.

It will do a better job than what we did under the 1982 rule. I also believe we did an excellent job dealing with the analysis that is required, and that we are optimistic about moving forward and demonstrating how we will apply this.

The other thing we are relying on is that we are putting together a Federal advisory committee to provide recommendations to the Secretary and myself about the directives and about how to move forward with this and also with the collaborative process that is required.

I think by having that committee in place, which will be a very diverse, group of individuals, that will need to spend the time to really look at this. We will be able to bring in not only employees from the forest that are moving forward with the plans, but also members of the community to be able to say, that this is how we're moving forward with it.

Here is how it is working. They can hear directly from them. I am optimistic that this time around, we will be able to demonstrate that this is a better process than in 1982. That if and when there is a court challenge, we will have that additional evidence to be able to demonstrate that this is a better way, while at the same time, addressing the same concerns that have been brought up in the previous litigation on our past attempts.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, I think we all know there's been a somewhat tortured history out there going through the courts.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I was a little surprised that the Chugach National Forest was selected as one of the first eight forests to revise its plan under the new rule because as it stands right now, the Chugach Plan doesn't require revision for yet another 5 years.

So the question is, why was the Chugach National Forest selected when you've got other forests out there that are well past their life of their 15-year plan? Why did you single out the Chugach National Forest?

Mr. TIDWELL. First of all, it is within every 10 to 15 years, and so they will be closed here in a couple of years, but they asked. The forest felt they were well positioned to be able to move forward.

They wanted to use this new rule to make some changes in their current forest plan based on what they are hearing from their communities and from the public.

So they requested that they could be one of the first forests to move forward with implementation. That was one of the things that we factored in as to which ones need, have a pressing need, and the ones that were positioned and had the ability to move forward.

Then, if there was a strong desire. The Chugach National Forest met all of those.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Do you worry that not only the Chugach National Forest, but the others, the other eight, might start revising their plan under this new rule, and then as we saw before, the rule gets thrown out in court.

And you're in a situation where you've effectively wasted a lot of time, clearly, a lot of money, because you have to start all over again.

Do you worry about that course ahead?

Mr. TIDWELL. We do factor that in, and that is where the forests that are currently going, they have been going through planning for the last couple of years. They will probably all, or most of those, will continue under the 1982 rule.

This new rule is so much more efficient, and it eliminates a lot of unnecessary modeling and analysis. So that, under any scenario, we probably are not going to lose any ground. I remain optimistic that because of the work that we did this time around, the additional work, working with our communities, that I feel that we have finally done this.

That this will be a rule that will withstand any challenges, and that we will be able to move forward and revise our forest plans for decades to come. I know, you know, there is a chance it could be challenged.

I feel really strongly about this, and I tell you I would not have this level of confidence if it was not based on just the work that has gone into this. The amount of support across the board, and not everyone is supportive. I understand that.

We definitely have more support for this rule than we have ever had for the previous three attempts.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, I guess it remains to be seen. Mr. Chairman, I have one more question, but my time is up.

Senator REED. Take your time. Go ahead.

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING

Senator MURKOWSKI. Okay. Then this is as it relates to the stewardship contracting and the Tongass. I'm sure you probably anticipated this question.

You indicated in your comments that you're seeking a permanent extension of the stewardship contracting authority, and have indicated that this is a real priority for USFS and its restoration efforts.

Unfortunately, this hasn't been met positively in the Tongass as it relates to the stewardship contracting. Back in 2008, USFS promised to offer four 10-year commercial timber sales at approximately 150 to 200 million board feet.

Those have been modified into two stewardship contracts at a greatly reduced volume. We've yet to see these contracts completed and offered to the industry.

So I'm concerned that with the focus on the stewardship contracting, what is happening is it's coming at the expense of a commercial sales program, and our very small male infrastructure is being squeezed here.

So I would ask you to address that criticism that USFS focus is on, in an area that directs resources away from the commercial sales, whether or not, I guess, the volume of commercial sales that you would anticipate be part of these contracts, and how you see it really operating in the Tongass?

Mr. TIDWELL. Stewardship Contracting is just another tool to augment the work that needs to be done. It is not to replace the timber sale contracts.

I share your concern about the lack of progress we have made with the Stewardship Contracts that USFS has been working on. It is one of the things that I would really like to work with you to maybe look at some of the different options that we may have up there on the Tongass to be able to move forward with that.

I want to be very clear. It is just part of our program. We are currently doing about 20 percent of the restoration work, the timber harvest under Stewardship Contracts across the country.

Ideally, would I like to see a little more of that? Yes. But we are still going to be using the timber sale contract. It is the right tool for certain projects.

However, we are finding the Stewardship Contract to be a very effective tool. I think it does have some use up on the Tongass. Maybe not as much up there as in other parts of the country, but we did have one very successful project last year. It was small.

But I think those are things that build confidence not only in the industry, but in the communities, that this is a good tool.

I am hoping because of the success they had last year on that small project that we will be able to move forward with the Stewardship Contracts, and to make these multiple-year contracts, so that it allows someone to be able to come in and make that financial investment in either maintaining the mill or investing in upgrading the mill.

If they know that there is a long-term contract here and that there is going to be a certain amount of material that is going to be available, it is going to be harvested, they can make sound financial decisions.

That is what we need to be able to do. Senator, I really look forward to being able to work with you to look at maybe a couple of different options I have been thinking about that maybe could help us on the Tongass.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Well, I'd like to take you up on that offer. Again, my concern is that you have a diversion of resources that goes toward the stewardship contracts at the expense of the other projects and how we affect these commercial sales.

So if we can sit down and discuss how some of these options might move forward on the Tongass, I think the people in the region would greatly appreciate it. I would appreciate it.

It's something that, again, in our conversations both in hearing and in my office, I've expressed the concern of those that are really just hanging on by their fingernails out there.

And the assurance of a longer-term contract and some reasonable volume is all they're looking for. They're not looking to take it back to the days of the timber industry 30 years ago. They're more pragmatic about that.

But we need to have some assurance. So if your folks can sit down with us and work through some realistic options, I think that that would be appreciated.

Mr. TIDWELL. Well, thank you.

I look forward to having that opportunity because I do think we have some additional flexibilities, some things we are doing here in the lower 48 that we should be able to have those same flexibilities on the Tongass too. Especially in these very difficult economic times that we are facing.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Exactly.

I would rather the people of Ketchikan and Prince of Wales be able to harvest timber, be able to have jobs in the small saw mills than figure out ways that we're piecing together Secure Rural Schools program funding.

Trying to rob Peter to pay Paul type of an approach. But knowing that that's all we have to offer right now, I think they would rather have the jobs. They would rather have that small industrial base.

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So I look forward to working with you, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the additional time.

Senator REED. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. And thank you, Chief, for your testimony. Did you have a comment? Please, go ahead.

H.R. 1581

Mr. TIDWELL. Yes. Mr. Chairman, I just need to, for the record, correct an earlier statement from Senator Tester about H.R. 1581.

I did not recognize the H.R. number versus the Senate number.

Senator REED. You didn't? I'm shocked.

Mr. TIDWELL. I apologize to the subcommittee, but we did testify on that bill in the past, and our position is that we strongly opposed that bill. I just wanted to correct the record. Thank you.

ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

Senator REED. The correction is duly noted. We will keep the record open for 1 week. You may receive additional questions from my colleagues. Any further statements by my colleagues will be submitted for the record.

[The following questions were not asked at the hearing, but were submitted to the Department for response subsequent to the hearing:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED SENATOR JACK REED

STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

Question. The fiscal year 2013 budget proposes a \$3.2 million reduction for the Urban and Community Forest program while the budget justification states that the fiscal year 2012 level of activity will be maintained in fiscal year 2013. How will a \$3.2 million reduction result in the same level of activity?

Answer. In fiscal year 2012, as in the previous 4 years, 15 percent of funds from selected State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs, including Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) were used to fund competitive, landscape-scale "Redesign" projects. The fiscal year 2013 budget proposes a Landscape Scale Restoration Program as a new Budget Line Item (BLI) that would formalize the Redesign competitive process. The \$3.3 million reduction is similar to the amount that would have been used to traditionally fund "Redesign" projects, which will now be funded by the Landscape Scale Restoration BLI. As such, the amount proposed in the UCF program is similar to previous years and is expected to have similar accomplishments.

Question. Can you specifically detail the initiatives planned for urban forests in fiscal year 2013?

Answer. UCF will work with the State forestry agencies and other partners to provide assistance to develop and maintain urban and community forestry programs. These programs protect and maintain urban trees and forests in more than 7,000 communities, representing more than 194 million people. In fiscal year 2013, UCF will continue to support the national strategic tree planting initiative launched in fiscal year 2012 to reduce energy consumption and provide communities with all of the benefits that urban trees provide including:

- improved air and water quality;
- improved human health and well-being;
- green jobs;
- recreation; and
- wildlife habitat.

In fiscal year 2013, UCF will also work with partners to advance the recommendations contained in the Vibrant Cities and Urban Forests Task Force Report, issued in the fall of 2011 and available online at <http://issuu.com/vibrantcities/docs/vibrantcitiesreport>.

Question. What are the goals of the proposed Landscape Scale Restoration program and how will States with predominately State and private forest lands, such as Rhode Island, likely to compete?

Answer. The goal of the proposed Landscape Scale Restoration Program is to focus and prioritize S&PF resources to better shape and influence forest land use at a scale and in a way that optimizes public benefits from trees and forests across all landscapes, from rural lands to urban centers. This increased focus on "All Lands" projects brings particular attention to implementation of the priorities identified in Rhode Island's State Forest Action Plan, formally called the State-wide assessment. Over the past 5 years, Rhode Island has been successful in receiving project funding through the competitive process and will continue to compete for project funding which includes projects with universities and nonprofit organization partners, and through project partnerships with adjoining States.

Question. Will the Forest Resource and Inventory Analysis program continue to have the same authority to partner with the States under research as it has had in S&PF?

Answer. Yes, this program, proposed for consideration under the Forest and Rangeland Research budget line item as Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA), will continue as a priority research area. FIA will continue to have the same ability to partner with States under research as it had under S&PF.

Question. How will you maintain these State partnerships without a distinct funding line?

Answer. In the fiscal year 2013 President's budget, FIA will have distinct funding within the Forest and Rangeland Research budget line item. This is identified as a priority research area in the budget justification with \$66,805,000 proposed for funding in fiscal year 2013. We will continue to work within our authority to diligently maintain these State partnerships. We will also continue measurement of field plots for data collection and provide State reports, but at a slower pace.

STATE FIRE ASSISTANCE

Question. Detail any changes in implementation of the following programs, which are proposed to be consolidated,

Answer. The proposed consolidation of the National Fire Plan-State Fire Assistance with Cooperative Fire Protection-State Fire Assistance in the fiscal year 2013 President's budget is expected to have minimal effects on how the program is implemented. States will continue to receive funding, as they have in previous years, for programs and projects such as hazardous fuels reduction, developing community wildfire protection plans, capacity building, training, increasing initial attack capabilities, improving firefighter safety and creating fire adapted communities. The combination of funding from two budget lines into a single budget line will simplify program management and performance measurement in addition to reducing administrative complexity.

VOLUNTEER FIRE ASSISTANCE

The proposed consolidation of the National Fire Plan-Volunteer Fire Assistance with Cooperative Fire Protection-Volunteer Fire Assistance in the fiscal year 2013 President's budget will have minimal effects on how the program is implemented. States will continue to receive funding targeted for rural fire departments that can be used for improving initial attack capability, providing training and improving firefighting safety. Funds will match financial assistance in 4,500 rural communities (population less than 10,000 people) to build and maintain fire suppression capacity.

FOREST HEALTH MANAGEMENT—FEDERAL

The proposed consolidation of the Wildland Fire Management Forest Health Management with S&PF Forest Health Management in the fiscal year 2013 President's budget will have minimal effects on programs or funding compared to fiscal year 2012. Major programs in fiscal year 2013 such as gypsy moth suppression, eradication and Slow-the-Spread program; and priority treatments to control invasive pests such as southern pine beetle and western bark beetle are planned at similar levels as fiscal year 2012. The combination of funding from four budget lines to two lines simplifies program management and performance in addition to reducing administrative complexity.

Forest Health Management-Federal Lands will continue to conduct forest insect and disease surveys on more than 400 million acres of forestlands; conduct forest insect and disease prevention, suppression, restoration, and eradication projects; provide technical assistance; and monitor forest health on all Federal lands including those of the Departments of Defense and the Interior, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

FOREST HEALTH MANAGEMENT—CO-OP

The combination of funding from four budget lines to two lines are similar as stated for Forest Health Management-Federal Lands. Forest Health Management-Cooperative Land funds will continue to provide technical and financial assistance to States and territories to conduct monitoring and treatments such as the Slow-the-Spread program for gypsy moth and for work on sudden oak death, southern pine beetle, and hemlock woolly adelgid.

FOREST RESOURCES INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

Historically, the FIA program has been funded from both Forest and Rangeland Research and the State and Private Forestry Forest Resources Information and Analysis program. In fiscal year 2013, FIA is proposed for consolidation under the Forest and Rangeland Research appropriation.

FIA will continue with reduced annual forest inventory data collection in all 50 States. This will result in extending the inventory cycles and State forest resource reports by 1 year for each of the 50 States.

Question. What will the effect be of the consolidations for States like Rhode Island that are not at risk of catastrophic wildfire, but still receive base funding in State and volunteer fire assistance?

Answer. The proposal to consolidate the State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) budget line items in the fiscal year 2013 President's budget is not expected to reduce base funding for States such as Rhode Island. The allocation methodology for SFA and VFA funding is reviewed approximately every 5 years. At this time, the different allocation methodologies being considered include base allocations for both State fire assistance and VFA.

WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

Question. Provide a table of the available aerial firefighting resources on the following dates, detailing at least the aircraft model (tanker and helicopter), exclusive

use (EXU) vs. call-when-needed (CWN), type (VLAT, SEAT, Type I, Type II, etc.), and owner (Minden, Neptune, CalFire, etc.):

- August 1, 2011;
- May 1, 2012;
- August 1, 2012 (projected); and
- May 1, 2013 (projected).

Answer. The United States Forest Service (USFS) does not maintain records on CalFire or other States' aircraft numbers or availability. Other States including Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska contract for or operate airtanker and/or helicopter resources, which provide an interagency aerial firefighting response in those States. The table below shows available contracted aviation assets and Department of Defense supplied Mobile Aerial Firefighting System (MAFFS) capabilities for USFS.

Aircraft	Owner	Contract Type	August 1, 2011	May 1, 2012	August 1, 2012	May 1, 2013
Large airtankers	Minden—2; Neptune—9	EXU	11	11	11	Up to 8
Next-generation large airtankers	To be determined on contract award ..	EXU—Not awarded as of May 5, 2012.	Up to 3	Up to 13
Type 1 helicopters	Multiple	EXU	26	30	30	30
Type 2 helicopters	Multiple	EXU	41	33	33	33
Type 3 helicopters	Multiple	EXU	61	61	61	61
Helicopters—All types	Multiple	CWN	Up to 378	Up to 378	Up to 378	Up to 378
Water scoopers	Aero Flite	EXU—Department of the Interior contract.	2	2	2	2
Water scoopers	To be determined on contract award ..	CWN—Department of the Interior contract.	Up to 4	Up to 4
Very large airtanker	10 tankers	CWN	1	1	1	1
Single engine airtankers	Unknown	EXU—Department of the Interior contract.	1	1	1	1
Mobile Aerial Firefighting System: C-130H/J	Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve.	None. Activated by request	8	8	8	8

Question. Provide a detailed explanation for how the \$24 million for the next-generation airtankers in the fiscal year 2013 budget will be spent.

Answer. The \$24 million will pay for contract costs associated with additional next-generation large airtankers in accordance with our large airtanker modernization strategy. The \$24 million augments existing funding to help account for inflation and anticipated increased cost of next-generation large airtankers.

Question. How many new aircraft do you expect to bring online in fiscal year 2013?

Answer. USFS will shortly award contracts for up to three next-generation large airtankers, to be operational in 2012, in addition to the 11 legacy P-2V airtankers. This contract may provide up to 10 additional next-generation airtankers in fiscal year 2013. The potential exists to have up to 20 large airtankers in 2013. The P-2V airtankers will continue to be part of our strategy to maintain large airtanker numbers until next-generation airtankers are fully operational.

Question. The airtanker Modernization Strategy calls for 18 to 28 next-generation tankers in total, which will require contracting aircraft over the next several years. What is the long-term plan for securing the fleet?

Answer. The long-term strategy is a modern large airtanker fleet as outlined in the Large Airtanker Modernization Strategy. It is not the intent of USFS, nor does USFS believe that there is an adequate supply of next-generation large airtankers, to replace our existing legacy (P-2V) fleet in 2013.

The next-generation aircraft are unproven airtankers, some with new-design retardant delivery systems or other new features which will take time to evaluate and modify to fully meet performance standards and airworthiness requirements. Therefore, a legacy airtanker contract will be a necessary part of our strategy to maintain large airtanker numbers until enough next-generation airtankers are fully operational. The current contract for the legacy airtankers ends December 2012. Another contract will be advertised in late 2012 or early 2013, which would include legacy large airtankers and will be structured to provide flexibility to both private industry and the Government. If next-generation large airtankers are available and approved they will be given preference.

Question. What are the estimates for how much additional funding this new fleet of aircraft will cost?

Answer. Since USFS does not have any long-term contracts for next-generation airtankers, it is not possible to provide this information.

Question. If a full complement of next-generation tankers called for in the Strategy is reached, how frequently will the National Guard's mobile airborne firefighting system units be used?

Answer. The National Guard and Air Force Reserve C-130s equipped with USFS owned MAFFS 2 retardant delivery systems will continue to provide surge capability to supplement commercial contract airtanker support.

We cannot predict how often MAFFS will be called upon; their activation is dependent on weather, fire activity, and other values which cannot easily be forecast. However, since 2003, MAFFS have averaged more than 250 missions annually.

Question. How is USFS ensuring that the limited Hazardous Fuels dollars are targeted to the highest-priority areas?

Answer. USFS continues to improve its processes for allocating fuel reduction funds, which prioritizes fuel reduction projects based on national priorities. These improvements include the use of a computer model to assist in making allocation decisions, rather than relying primarily on historical funding patterns and professional judgment. The computer model uses data from various sources and considers wildfire potential, negative consequences of wildfire, program performance with prior year's allocations, and potential opportunities that meet other integrated resources objectives.

The agency annually updates the model inputs to use the best available data and science. USFS also directs its regional offices to use a similar process and finer scale information, to further inform allocations to units and selection of fuel treatment projects based on national and regional priorities. USFS provides annual direction to its regional offices on how to fund fuel treatment projects that best meet national priorities.

Question. The subcommittee has made an investment of more than \$1 billion in the last 3 years alone for fuels reduction in USFS. How is USFS showing the return on investment, such as reduced risk to communities or reduced suppression costs?

Answer. USFS now requires its field units to complete a standardized report whenever a wildfire burns into an existing fuel treatment, in other words, when a fuel treatment is "tested" by wildfire. This report includes an assessment of how the fire behavior changed, if the fire effects changed as the wildfire burned through the fuel treatment, and if the fuel treatment made management and suppression of the

wildfire easier and safer. These are real world examples of fuel treatment effectiveness.

The initial results indicate that most fuel treatments reduce wildfire behavior and reduce fire severity under all but the most extreme wildfire conditions. As this data set grows and is combined with the latest research, USFS expects to be able to draw conclusions about which fuel treatments are most effective under various circumstances of ecosystems, fuel types, weather conditions, and other variables. The agency also expects to refine its estimates of how fuel treatment effectiveness will decline over time and to evaluate the cost effectiveness of these treatments. USFS takes fuel treatment effectiveness very seriously and continues to improve its measurement and understanding by incorporating the latest research.

LAND ACQUISITION

Question. Why were the “Crown of the Continent” and “Florida/George Longleaf Pine” ecosystems chosen as the Collaborative Landscape Planning Areas for fiscal year 2013?

Answer. These selected projects contain landscapes that are among the most important for conservation, recreation, and restoration in the United States. These projects support American Great Outdoors Action Item 5.2a: Implement an inter-agency process to invest part of the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund funds in high-yield conservation projects that address shared ecological goals.

The Crown of the Continent project is one of the last remaining intact mountain ecosystems in the coterminous United States and 1 of the 23 last remaining large intact ecosystems in the world. The mixed wetland and longleaf pine habitats of the Florida panhandle and Okeefenokee swamp in southern Georgia protect critical drinking water sources for growing human populations in the region, and provide important habitat for migratory birds and the remaining bear population. Both areas are threatened with development and landscape fragmentation that would impair resource management. Both landscapes also have robust local support and grassroots organization and planning, including local and State government supporters that desire a public-private partnership to address conservation needs.

Question. What is the long-term plan for the Collaborative Landscape Planning Areas? Will the same landscapes continue to be the budget priority until they are completed, or will different geographical areas be the focus in fiscal year 2014?

Answer. The long-term plan of the interagency work is to maintain the focus in a landscape until the stated conservation goals are as complete as possible. Not all agencies have the same demand in each landscape, but Collaborative Landscape Planning (CLP) will seek to complete as much as possible before moving to a new landscape. There may be new geographical areas considered for fiscal year 2014. Both agencies are waiting on pre-proposals from the field to determine whether or not there is capacity or funding to start working in one or more new landscapes.

Question. How do the Collaborative Landscape projects rank vis-à-vis the 14 ranked acquisitions on the prioritized list?

Answer. All of the projects, core and collaborative, are important agency priorities. The core projects focus on acquiring the highest priority lands within the National Forest System boundaries that further specific agency goals for forest and grassland restoration, watershed management under the Watershed Condition Framework, and public and private access. The Collaborative Landscape Planning projects are focused on landscapes where the Federal agencies can more effectively coordinate land acquisitions with government and local community partners to achieve the highest priority shared conservation goals. These projects respond to locally supported planning efforts to protect critical ecosystems before fragmentation occurs.

Question. The proposed Priority Recreational Access program requires a cost-share and caps projects at \$250,000 each. How were these requirements determined?

Answer. A per project cap is proposed to help distribute the opportunity to complete a recreational access project among the nine USFS regions. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) is the cap because it equates to each region getting at least two projects. The cost-share proposal would help the appropriated dollars go further and demonstrates a strong show of support from non-Federal partners. The cost-share rate was set at 25 percent, a low percentage and a resultant relatively small amount of non-Federal money to bring to the table (less than \$62,000 for the most expensive project).

Question. Are there \$5 million worth of identified Priority Recreational access projects (matching the budget justification’s requirements) that can be accomplished within fiscal year 2013? Provide a list of potential projects detailing at least the location by national forest, total acreage, types of recreation served, cost, and whether the project is a conservation easement or fee title acquisitions.

Answer. There is a substantial need for access to National Forest System lands for these purposes as demonstrated in our annual land acquisition programs. USFS has not developed a list of projects. This is an important initiative for potential projects to be proposed by the public and nongovernmental organizations. While we are anxious to issue a Request for Proposals so that we can learn about projects that are new to us, we have already been contacted by several groups. One potential example is gaining an easement for the Seely Lake Community Trail across Montana Department of Natural Resources and State school lands. This trail provides year-round motorized and nonmotorized access for 5,000 acres of hunting and hiking, 16,000 acres for horseback riding, and 32,000 acres for mountain biking. We are confident there will be a number of robust responses from all USFS regions to the Request for Proposals that meet the fiscal year 2013 budget justification requirements.

Question. While the proposed Priority Recreational Access program would be funded at \$5 million, the longstanding Critical Inholding Acquisitions account is zeroed out in fiscal year 2013. Why does the new focus area come at the expense of inholdings?

Answer. The Priority Recreational Access line item is proposed for only 1 year to focus on unique recreational access problems.

Question. Will USFS be able to secure critical inholding acquisitions without a specific line item?

Answer. USFS may secure some inholdings with the Priority Recreational Access line item, but projects will be selected based on different criteria than is required for critical inholdings. The criteria for recreational access will rate tracts based on the project's ability to maximize access to areas previously considered inaccessible and that increase visitor use. Recreational Access acquisitions may or may not be inholdings.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN

Question. This year's budget provides you with \$24 million to contract for new firefighting aircraft. And you have publicly stated that you intend to acquire three new planes this year, so that works out to \$8 million per plane acquisition.

Answer. The fiscal year 2013 budget request includes \$24 million to acquire new firefighting aircraft. We are estimating contracting for 10 additional next-generation airtankers in 2013. In addition, the three next-generation airtankers that may be awarded and operational in 2012 will be funded utilizing fiscal year 2012 budget appropriated funds.

Question. Following this pricing model, will the United States Forest Service (USFS) be seeking \$80 million to purchase the 10 planes you intend to acquire next year?

Answer. USFS does not intend to purchase these aircraft. The services will be acquired through contracts operated by the contractor. The \$24 million in fiscal year 2013 will be used to help account for inflation and anticipated increased cost of next-generation large airtankers.

Question. Aerial firefighting contractors tell me that the USFS's 5-year contracts, with single year options, are not long enough for them to secure the capital needed to purchase firefighting aircraft.

Answer. The next-generation large airtanker contract was lengthened in response to private industry input. It is a Firm Fixed Price Multi-Year contract(s) not to exceed 10 years (a 5-year base period with five 1-year options).

Question. What indication do you have from your contractors that they will be able to actually provide the 13 planes by the end of next year?

Answer. USFS is skeptical that private industry will be able to design, build, test, and gain approval of the next-generation large airtankers as quickly as they state. These aircraft are generally unproven as airtankers, some with new-design retardant delivery systems or other new features which will take time to evaluate and modify to fully meet performance standards and airworthiness requirements.

However, several of the contractors are represented by an aerial firefighting industry group (American Helicopter Services and Aerial Firefighting Association) which has publicly stated that private industry is "technically capable and financially able to bring about this fleet modernization plan."

Question. If the terms of the contract were longer, would that reduce the Federal cost of acquiring these planes?

Answer. Private industry has told us that longer contract periods should reduce overall costs during the full contract period. The next-generation contract with a base 5-year period and five 1-year options and an incremental delivery option pro-

vides flexibility for private industry and the Government delivering next-generation large airtankers this year, while providing time for current and new airtanker vendors to secure financing, design, and develop aircraft for 2013 and beyond.

Question. Do you have the authority to offer a longer contract?

Answer. Under the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FARs) USFS was able to solicit this 5-year base with five 1-year options contract for airtankers. The FARs do not allow for more than 5 years with 5 years of extensions for this type of contract.

Question. Chief Tidwell, with the proposed 25-percent cut to hazardous fuels, how many fewer acres will you be able to treat?

Answer. The hazardous fuel's program request for fiscal year 2013 is about the same as fiscal year 2012, but we request that \$75 million of that be transferred into Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR). The \$75 million represents the amount hazardous fuels is shifting to IRR in fiscal year 2013. These are hazardous fuel funds that have traditionally been spent outside the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and for restoration in previous years. These funds will now be combined into IRR and support integrated restoration and accomplish landscape-level ecosystem restoration which includes hazardous fuel reduction. IRR is designed to help address at the national level the complete scope of restoration activities, highlighting water, fuels reduction and road decommissioning, while also integrating the many other activities that have always been central to the agency's mission.

Question. How many fewer acres will be treated in California?

Answer. We don't anticipate fewer acres treated in California due to IRR. If fewer acres are treated it will be due to other factors such as cost per acre, weather, and the time needed to complete analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. Also, the acre target has been reduced due to the increased cost of treating the WUI.

Question. It is my understanding that you revoked the 10-percent pay raise for firefighters because retention rates improved.

This reasoning doesn't hold water. If the pay raise worked, and retention rates have stabilized, why roll back the successful initiative?

Answer. During March 2009, USFS implemented two retention incentives to address the 13-percent attrition rate affecting the fire program for permanent/career conditional employees. The first incentive implemented converted less than full-time employees in certain positions to a full-time tour of duty. This incentive is still in place and includes a full-time tour of duty for all new employees hired in these positions. The annual cost of this incentive is \$21 million and is funded from our Wildland Fire Preparedness allocated funds.

The second incentive implemented was a 10-percent increase in base pay for primary fire positions for grades GS-5 through GS-8. This incentive required annual approval with the Department of Agriculture (USDA). Approvals were requested and granted for March 2009 through February 2010, March 2010 through February 2011, and March 2011 through February 25, 2012. USFS did not request reauthorization from USDA for this retention incentive after February 25, 2012. The decision was based on the agency's ability to maintain Fire Fighting Production Capability due to the low attrition rate. USFS will continue to monitor our fire management workforce situation and respond appropriately.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

Question. Can you provide a brief update of the land acquisition program for the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) and what priority projects may be secured this year? I have made GMNF land acquisition a priority during my entire time in the U.S. Senate and have seen Federal ownership go from less than 300,000 acres to more than 400,000 acres during that time. Seeing the benefits of GMNF land acquisition helped inspire me to create the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) which has protected more than 2 million acres nationally.

Answer. The fiscal year 2013 budget request did not propose specific new land acquisition projects for the GMNF. The GMNF is in the process of completing various land acquisitions including the following:

Recently the GMNF acquired from the Trust for Public Land, a 300-acre parcel (\$318,000), that contains approximately 8 acres of wetlands. It is contiguous to a large block of National Forest System lands to the west and east. The property is also within a bear corridor (a species of high public interest), and provides a swath of currently undeveloped land that serves as an east-west traveling corridor for black bears.

Partnering with the Manchester Land Trust, the GMNF recently acquired a 120-acre parcel (\$350,000) in Manchester and Winhall that contains a significant portion

of Stony Brook, which is a tributary to the Batten Kill River, high-quality northern hardwoods, that provides opportunities for backcountry recreation.

The GMNF also acquired from a private landowner a 4-acre parcel (\$20,000) that consolidates the last block of private land within the section of National Forest System lands in the Town of Ripton.

Under contract is an 80-acre parcel located in the Town of Woodford that is contiguous to National Forest System lands on the south and east and provides the public with opportunities for backcountry recreation.

The GMNF is actively engaged with the potential purchase of a multitude of properties, including two parcels totaling 330 acres that provide public access to a larger block of National Forest System lands and a 36-acre parcel entirely surrounded by National Forest System lands within the Taconic expansion area. In addition, several additional parcels that meet the GMNF Land and Resource Management Plan and National Strategic Plan goals are being negotiated.

In addition we have worked with partners to protect 78,829 acres of important forests across 62 tracts in Vermont, through FLP. Although not in Federal ownership, many of these tracts are strategically located adjacent to the GMNF.

Partnering with third parties, such as the Trust for Public Land, the Conservation Fund and the Manchester Land Trust, the GMNF acquisition program continues to work with local communities to identify and support priority acquisitions.

Question. I introduced the legislation which created the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area (NRA) within the GMNF in order to literally put this fantastic recreational resource “on the map”. Since its creation in 2006 however, this NRA has struggled to gain the national recognition that it so richly deserves. Can you tell me what the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is doing within Vermont, regionally, and across the country to fully implement the New England Wilderness Act of 2006? This act established the National Recreation Area and calls for the Moosalamoo to become a national showcase of integrated forest management, as well as a nationally significant recreational resource.

Answer. The GMNF has been working hard to implement the New England Wilderness Act of 2006 as part of the Chief’s 10-Year Wilderness Challenge. For example:

- The GMNF has worked with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to remove culverts by hand and decommission roads within wilderness designated by the act.
- The forest has plans to remove larger culverts in designated wilderness that would require mechanized equipment. This work requires NEPA review before restoration of these roads can be implemented.
- USFS is working closely with the Moosalamoo Association by providing Challenge Cost Share Agreements for trail maintenance projects throughout the National Recreation Area. An American Recovery and Reinvestment Act project was recently awarded “Project of the Year” from the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council and received recognition from the USFS regional office for collaboration and partnership success.
- Partnering with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and the Vermont Mountain Bike Association, the GMNF recently completed major trail work on the Leicester Hollow—Chandler Ridge Loop Trail in the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area.
- The GMNF continues to inventory and identify the condition of our campsites within the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR LISA MURKOWSKI

Question. In light of the President’s announcement last week of an Executive order creating an interagency working group “. . . to coordinate the efforts of Federal agencies responsible for overseeing the safe and responsible development of unconventional domestic natural gas resources”, and the inclusion of the United States Department of Agriculture in that working group, how are the activities of individual forests, like those of the George Washington and Wayne National Forests, being coordinated within the United States Forest Service (USFS) and with the interagency working group?

Answer. The Executive order, dated April 13, 2012, directs that Interagency Working Group membership “. . . shall include deputy-level representatives or equivalent officials, designated by the head of the respective agency or office . . .” and lists the Department of Agriculture under membership. Individual forest and grassland line officers will continue to coordinate with appropriate officials within USFS through the agency Deputy Chiefs. The agency leadership through the Chief

and the Deputy Chiefs will coordinate with Department of Agriculture officials. Departmental representatives will coordinate with other agencies on appropriate issues within the interagency working group.

Question. When do you expect the George Washington National Forest plan and the Wayne National Forest's study to be finalized?

Answer. We anticipate that the George Washington National Forest plan will be completed in the late summer of 2012. The Wayne National Forest's study is projected to be finalized in mid to late June 2012.

Question. Can you please get back to me when you have had a chance to review this as an agency and inform me of your plans?

Answer. Yes.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO SUSAN SPEAR

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

Question. The Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) is one of the most recreated National Forests in the region—the roughly 80 employees of the GMNF serve some 3 to 4 million visitors annually, and are within a day's drive of 70 million people. The GMNF serves as the only experience that many people from crowded east coast cities may have with Federal natural resource agencies. The staffs of the GMNF do a great job of resource management but they do so working out of a leased facility, some distance from the Forest itself and with very modest and dated visitor facilities.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has identified the site for construction of a new GMNF headquarters building, on National Forest land, on Route 4, the Gateway to the National Forest. Construction of a new headquarters will save the Federal Government money, as compared to ongoing lease payments, and allow for an even better job of resource management and public education. This is a project that I have supported for 10 years and am eager to see it built in the near future. Can you assure me that USFS will allocate the necessary \$1 million to complete the design of the new headquarters building for the GMNF this year?

Answer. While the design and construction phases of a new Forest Supervisor's office in Mendon, Vermont, are included in the Eastern Region's Infrastructure Priority Project List, there are many projects of higher priority nationally. Therefore, design work for the new GMNF headquarters has not been initiated this year. Overall agency funding for facility design/construction in 2012 has been reduced by 56 percent since 2010. As a result, we are reassessing many competing priorities, considering less-costly alternatives, and re-evaluating the highest-priority projects that may be possible to complete with very limited funding.

For fiscal year 2013 the budget request includes a program increase of \$23,799,000 from the fiscal year 2012 enacted level for facilities to support the safety and health of all users of existing infrastructure and to judiciously defer all new construction, including phased projects that include new construction, when other cost effective and reasonable options exist.

Question. The GMNF was at the epicenter of the worst damage wrought by Tropical Storm Irene. USFS staff performed heroically to help local communities even though many of them had suffered damage to their own homes. There are 900 miles of trails and roads within the GMNF, 85 percent of which were damaged and a majority of the damaged trails remain closed as our most active trail season approaches, with repair needs in excess of \$2 million. Will you be able to allocate resources to repair the damage caused by Tropical Storm Irene to the trails and roads within the GMNF in a timely manner?

Answer. Yes, we have been and will continue to allocate resources to the trails and roads within the GMNF. For fiscal year 2012, the Eastern Region allocated \$390,000 for use in trail restoration and repair directly related to Tropical Storm Irene. USFS was able to apply appropriated funds to the early recovery stages on the GMNF at the end of fiscal year 2011 and in early fiscal year 2012. Additional funding has been secured from the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief for federally Owned Roads (ERFO) program. The GMNF will be working with local partners and contractors to prioritize and implement major repairs in fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2013.

While much of the road repair work qualifies for ERFO funding, almost all trail related damage does not. We will continue to work with established volunteer organizations and other nongovernmental organizations on creative ways to bring these trails up to safe standards for public use.

The GMNF completed a comprehensive survey of all roads, trails, and facilities that were damaged extensively during Tropical Storm Irene. Many roads and trails require environmental assessment work before work can be initiated.

The GMNF has been working closely with the public and municipal leaders on short- and long-term solutions, including establishing priorities for limited funding and resources to meet specific public demands. This work includes shifting resource management priorities so that public and private access is available through damaged GMNF roads.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECESS

Senator REED. And we ask you to respond to any requests for information or questions as promptly as possible, Chief.

With no further comment, the hearing is concluded. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 10:58 a.m., Wednesday, April 18, the subcommittee was recessed.]