

**Opening Statement for Chairman Jack Reed
U.S. Forest Service FY 2015 Budget Hearing
Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
Wednesday, April 30, 2014
9:30 a.m.**

Good morning. This is the third hearing of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee on the President's Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request. Today we will discuss the budget for the U.S. Forest Service.

I'm very pleased to welcome Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. Chief, we are always glad to see you and I hope we can cover quite a bit together this morning.

I'd also like to recognize the agency's budget director, Tony Dixon, who is testifying before the Subcommittee for the first time. Welcome, Mr. Dixon.

Turning to the Budget Request for the Forest Service, the Fiscal Year 2015 request is a total of \$5.7 billion, including \$4.77 billion in discretionary spending, and in addition, the President has proposed a significant budgetary shift, to

provide \$954 million in fire suppression funding within the disaster cap.

Since I assumed the chairmanship of this Subcommittee, we have been forced to make unfortunate tradeoffs to provide the appropriate resources for fire suppression, both on the front-end, through increases in the 10-year average, and on the back-end, through repayment of borrowing because the 10-year average proved insufficient.

In the last two years alone, we've been forced to carve out more than \$1 billion from other accounts in order to pay for unanticipated emergency firefighting costs. This has been a change from traditional practice under which extraordinary firefighting costs were treated as emergencies just like other disasters. .

These additional obligations have come at a cost in the investments we can make in public land maintenance and construction, water and sewer grants, land acquisition, and every other account funded in this bill.

I know that you, Chief, are as worried as we are up on this dais about the Forest Service becoming just the Fire Service. This is just as troubling to me as it is to my Western colleagues. Indeed, I would note that my colleagues Senators Wyden and Crapo have introduced bipartisan legislation in the Senate to deal with this problem. An identical bill has been introduced in the House by Congressman Mike Simpson, former chairman of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. And it has been cosponsored by Representative Ken Calvert, the current chairman of the Subcommittee.

While Rhode Island does not have any National Forest lands, we do rely on the Forest Service's expertise and grant programs for our state and private forested lands. We all agree that it is a federal responsibility to fight fires on federal lands and to protect the life and property of Americans. But if we continue down the path that we have been forced onto under the current budget caps, we put in jeopardy the rest of the Forest Service's mission.

For Rhode Island, that would mean losing the Forest Service's expertise in research and science that has led to breakthroughs to defend against the invasive species and disease that attack our trees in the country and in the city, Forest Legacy funds to protect threatened areas, and urban and community forest funds to get people outdoors.

That is why I think what you have done Chief, to work on the budget proposal to move a portion of spending into the disaster cap, is such a great step forward. It takes care of 3 problems we have been struggling with. First, it removes the agency's need to borrow from non-fire accounts and provides a steady stream of funding throughout the fire season, so that you can do both your firefighting and your other work without setting aside funds within construction, land acquisition, and your mandatory programs in case there is a need for it. Second, it allows us to put emphasis on the programs that will help you prevent catastrophic fire in the future, such as hazardous fuels reduction, watershed and vegetation management, and inholdings acquisitions.

Third, it protects the programs that would otherwise get cut within future budget proposals to pay for more fire needs, like research and state grant programs.

So with this budget proposal and your recent acquisition of airtankers from the Coast Guard and Next Generation air contracts, it is quite possible that Fiscal Year 2015 could be the turning point in adopting a more rational approach to fire management. You deserve much credit for the progress, Chief.

While I'm pleased that we were able to move the Administration to address the fire problem, I'm disappointed that we see some of the same cuts to other programs, like Research, State & Private Forestry, and International Forestry, even with the shift of firefighting resources. I'm looking forward to discussing with you how we can work together to restore and strengthen those programs as well.

Before we get started, I'd like to turn to the Ranking Member, Senator Murkowski, for any remarks that she'd like to make.