

March 26, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior Environment and Related Agencies  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Ranking Member, Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member, Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Chairman Simpson, and Ranking Members Merkley and Pingree:

As you begin work for Fiscal Year (FY) 2027, we respectfully request increased funding to help state and local agencies fight wildfires across the nation. To fully and adequately fight fires and keep our homes and communities safe, the undersigned organizations request a total of **\$82 million for the State Fire Assistance (SFA) Program and \$23 million for the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program for FY 2027**. We thank the Committees for their historic support for both programs and urge the continued growth in resources commensurate with heightened needs on the ground.

America's forests and forest-dependent communities are at risk from outbreaks of pests and pathogens, persistent drought, and the buildup of hazardous fuels. Urbanization and development patterns are placing more homes and communities near fire-prone landscapes. Due to these and other factors, the United States has been experiencing a crisis over the last two decades. Wildfires have been growing in unprecedented size, complexity, and destructivity, and are threatening parts of the nation not historically impacted by fire. Prior to 2003, our forests and communities experienced an average of 2.8 million acres burning annually. Since 2004, however, wildfires have annually burned over 7.2 million acres on average, with historic highs in the numbers of acres burned in 2015, 2017, and 2020. Given the state of the country's current fire environment, 2026 is expected to be another historic year. In fact, on February 19th, the Ranger Road Fire alone burned over 280,000 acres in Oklahoma and Kansas in less than 24 hours.

Congress must continue to fund the work of fighting fires on the ground. The VFA and SFA programs are essential wildfire risk reduction and protection programs within the USDA Forest Service's (Forest Service) State, Private, and Tribal Forestry (SPTF) program area. The important work accomplished through SFA and VFA helps decrease total federal emergency wildfire suppression costs and reduces the threat to communities from fire on public and private lands.

SFA is an important federal mechanism for assisting states and local fire departments in responding to wildfires and in conducting land management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. The program helps train state and local emergency responders who are usually first to arrive at a wildfire incident, and the program is critical to equip them with the tools, training and resources they

need to put wildfires out efficiently and safely. For example, in FY 2025, the SFA program provided over \$14.2 million in funding for hazardous fuels treatments, which was used by states and their partners to directly or indirectly treat over 191,800 acres, either with prescribed fire or mechanically. Another \$1.9 million in SFA assistance was provided to develop 2,300 community wildfire plans and assessments. SFA also provided almost \$4.6 million in equipment, and over \$3 million to conduct more than 13,900 wildfire prevention projects. In total, SFA helped over 7,700 communities manage their wildfire risk, and trained 22,800 wildland firefighters in FY 2025 alone.

The localized support provided by SFA is crucial because approximately 80 percent of wildfires burn within state and local fire department jurisdictions. Even with wildfires on federal lands, SFA-supported crews and apparatus are often the first to arrive for initial attack. Increases in SFA funding will help expand wildfire preparedness and mitigation capacity for state forestry agencies. Attacking fires when they are small is the key to reducing fatalities, injuries, loss of homes and cutting federal firefighting costs. The need for increased funding for fire suppression on federal lands has broad support. The need to increase fire suppression funding for state and private lands - where many fires that impact federal lands begin - is just as urgent. **With that in mind, in FY 2027, we urge you to provide no less than \$82 million for the State Fire Assistance program.**

The VFA program provides support to volunteer fire departments protecting our nation's smaller communities with staffing that is mostly volunteer in nature. National needs assessment survey data shows that fire departments protecting smaller communities tend to lack adequate resources and rely more on volunteer staffing compared to departments protecting communities with larger populations. Fire departments that regularly respond to wildfires face particularly acute resource challenges as the equipment, training, and apparatus used to fight wildfire is almost entirely different from that used to fight structure fires. The VFA program helps bridge these resource gaps for thousands of fire departments across the country.

VFA ensures adequate capacity to respond to wildfires, reducing the risk to communities, people, homes and property, and firefighters. This capacity is critical because these state and local resources are the first responders to more than 80 percent of wildfires – whether on state, federal or private lands. According to the Forest Service, during FY 2025, the VFA program provided aid to over 8,000 rural communities, trained more than 12,000 firefighters, expanded or organized 13 fire departments, and provided 3,800 grants totaling over \$15.3 million to these departments for the purchasing, rehabilitating, or maintaining of critical equipment. **In FY 2027, we urge you to provide no less than \$23 million for the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program.**

We appreciate the difficult task the Committees face in the current budget climate. It is important to remember, however, that these vital programs safeguard human life, habitat, and property, and reduce the overall cost of wildfire management. Accordingly, we urge you to continue to bolster support for these critical programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Amberg Fire Department  
Athelstane Volunteer Fire Department  
City of Marinette Fire Department

Climate and Wildfire Institute  
Coleman Fire Department  
Congressional Fire Services Institute  
Crivitz Fire Department  
Fire Department Advisory Council  
Forest Stewards Guild  
Howard Fire Company  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
International Code Council  
Kentucky Forest Industries Association  
Middle Inlet Volunteer Fire Department  
National Association of State Fire Marshals  
National Association of State Foresters  
National Fallen Firefighters Foundation  
National Volunteer Fire Council  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
Pennsylvania SFI Implementation Committee  
Pittsville Fire Department  
Pound Volunteer Fire Department  
Tennessee Forestry Association  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Pennsylvania Forestry Association  
Town of Brazeau Fire Department  
Town of Peshtigo Fire Department  
Wausaukee Fire District  
Wisconsin State Firefighters Association