

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 3, 2017

The Honorable Mike Crapo  
Chairman  
Senate Banking Committee  
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown  
Ranking Member  
Senate Banking Committee  
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Crapo and Ranking Member Brown:

On July 17, you introduced a bill to reauthorize the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Along with the reauthorization of these flood and disaster programs, the Committee also included a provision of great interest to us – a wildfire funding fix. We write to strongly urge you to ensure this provision remains in the final bill as it is considered by the Committee and in the full Senate.

We have worked together in a bipartisan fashion on wildfire budgeting issues for years to end the cycle of underfunding fire suppression, which currently forces federal agencies to steal from fire prevention in order to put out fires, or “fire borrow.” Senator Wyden and Senator Crapo introduced the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFDA) in 2013 to address this problem. The bill had 17 cosponsors in 2013 and 20 cosponsors when it was introduced again in 2015. The bill had the support of more than 250 groups and it was included in the president’s budget two years in a row. The Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee held dozens of hearings on wildfire and agency heads testified in support of the bill and efforts to fix the fire borrowing problem.

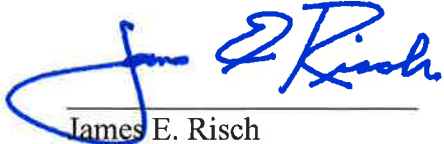
Over the years, we have worked to fix fire borrowing in any way we could find. We have worked together on amendments, letters to the administration, spoken repeatedly at committee hearings, and given speeches on the Senate floor to bring attention to the severity of this problem. Yet year after year, fire season after fire season, the fires continue to worsen and any attempt at a fix gets snarled in Washington politics.

It has become clear that we must take every opportunity available to try and move a fire fix forward because the longer Washington, D.C. gridlock prevents any real change from happening, the worse the fires get and the more our communities are put at risk.

The reality is, severe fires can and do lead to severe flooding. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), “wildfires leave the ground charred, barren, and unable to absorb water, creating conditions ripe for flash flooding and mudflow. Flood risk remains significantly higher until vegetation is restored—up to 5 years after a wildfire.” Addressing the fire funding problem and getting more fire prevention work done on the ground will improve forest health and reduce the risk of flooding. That is a win for communities and a win for our forests and watersheds. We support the opportunity to address all of these issues in one place – the flood insurance reauthorization bill.

Once again, in the middle of summer 2017, the need for this fix is spotlighted as our states watch wildfires rip through their woods. Thank you for recognizing that wildfires cause devastation to communities across the country, and should be treated as the national disasters they are. Fixing the broken system of wildfire funding through the National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 will ensure that federal agencies have the stable funding they need to not only fight wildfires but also complete forest health projects that will reduce the risk and severity of future fires. We stand ready to help in any way we can to get this over the finish line.

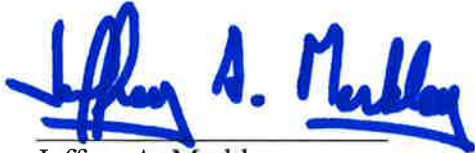
Sincerely,



James E. Risch  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator