

NEWS RELEASE

2008 BUDGET FOR WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM PROTECTS COMMUNITIES AND RESOURCES

The President's proposed 2008 budget sustains Interior's strong investment in wildland firefighting efforts. Our program will protect communities and reduce hazardous fuels by working with our Federal, State, Tribal, local, and other non-Federal partners.

Firefighting preparedness resources for 2008 are funded at \$268 million, and suppression is funded at the 10-year average of \$294 million. Together, these provide funding for firefighters, equipment, training, and much more. This funding will maintain our high success rate in suppressing over 95 percent of unwanted fires quickly.

Collaboration is key to success. Through the National Fire Plan's newly updated 10-Year Implementation Plan and the President's Healthy Forests Initiative, Department Bureaus have developed stronger relationships than ever with Federal, State, Tribal and local cooperators.

Hazardous Fuels Reduction Continues as a Strong Focus

Under the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forests Initiative, Interior has treated almost 7 million acres of hazardous fuels in our forests and rangelands - an area larger than the states of Maryland and Delaware. The budget proposal will dedicate about \$203 million to hazardous fuels reduction to protect communities and continue to improve forest and rangeland health

The Department continues its focus on treating fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface, where homes and other structures intermingle with undeveloped wildland vegetation. We will invest about 65 percent of our hazardous fuel reduction dollars in this Wildland Urban Interface in 2008.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 provides strong incentives for communities to engage in comprehensive fire risk mitigation planning and hazardous fuel reduction projects through development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). Developing CWPPs can help a community clarify and refine its priorities for protection of life, property, and critical infrastructure in the Wildland Urban Interface.

Through enhanced use of geospatial information, the Department will be able to strategically target investments. LANDFIRE is a geospatial tool used to identify grassland, shrublands, woodlands and forests at increased risk of fire across the nation. These geospatial data will help managers focus on areas of increased risk of fire due to accumulation of fuels. Mapping is complete for the western portion of the United States. Eastern portions of the nation will be completed by 2008, and Alaska and Hawaii will be completed by 2009.

Cost Effectiveness

The 2008 Wildland Fire Management budget balances fiscal restraint with the guiding principles of the National Fire Plan – prioritization, coordination, collaboration, and accountability.

To improve cost effectiveness, Interior is adopting many of the significant wildland fire cost containment measures recently identified in a U.S. Forest Service-lead effort. This will enhance our ability to control large fire suppression costs while more efficiently managing wildland firefighting efforts. These efficiencies focus on wildland fire leadership, operations and overall fire management practices.

Interior will continue its efforts to reduce the growth of large fire suppression costs - emphasizing land management decisions that affect fuel loads and resource protection, and developing metrics and accountability measures to evaluate managerial cost effectiveness.

Under the 2008 budget proposal, Interior will continue protecting communities and resources. Working with our partners, we will make communities safer, reduce fuels that threaten our shared resources, and manage our resources more effectively.

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