



April 22, 2015

Senator Mike Enzi,
Chair
Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Paul Ryan
Chair
Committee on the Budget
House of Representatives
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Tom McClintock
Chair
House Natural Resource Subcommittee on
Federal Lands
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Glenn Thompson
Chair
House Agriculture Subcommittee on
Conservation, Energy, and Forestry
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: S.235: Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2015 and H.R. 167: Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2015

Dear Chairpersons Enzi, Ryan, McClintock, and Thompson:

This letter provides the endorsement of the Western Urban Water Coalition (WUWC), for S 235: Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2015, now pending in the Senate Budget Committee, and H.R. 167: the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act of 2015, now pending in the House Budget Committee, the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands, and the Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy and Forestry. The bills would add new budget authority for wildfire suppression costs and fund these costs as natural disaster recoveries.

The bills would assure that funds budgeted for prevention of future wildfires and for emergency stabilization of landscapes damaged by wildfire remain available to federal agencies for these purposes.

Under current law, federal land managing agencies pay wildfire suppression costs out of agency budgets for fire management. Increasing wildfire activity means that federal land managers quickly run through budgeted funds for wildfire suppression and are forced to utilize funds originally dedicated to hazardous fuel reduction and emergency stabilization treatments for wild fire suppression. This creates a vicious cycle in which money needed to prevent next year's wildfires is used to suppress this year's wildfires.

Established in June 1992 to address the West's unique water issues, WUWC consists of the largest urban water utilities in the West, serving over 35 million western water consumers in major metropolitan areas in five states. The membership of the WUWC includes the following urban water utilities: Arizona – Central Arizona Project, City of Phoenix and the Salt River Project; California – Eastern Municipal Water District, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, San Diego County Water Authority, City and County of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and Santa Clara Valley Water District; Colorado – Aurora Water, Colorado Springs Utilities, and Denver Water; Nevada – Las Vegas Valley Water District, Southern Nevada Water Authority, and Truckee Meadows Water Authority; and Washington – Seattle Public Utilities.

Given that much of the water supply for WUWC members originates on federal lands, when these lands burn it impacts municipal water supplies in the western U.S. WUWC members, therefore, have a strong interest in 1) the suppression of wildfires on federal lands, 2) the prevention of wildfires through hazardous fuel reduction programs, and 3) recovery from wildfires through activities such as emergency stabilization of stream banks both during and immediately following a wildfire, to reduce the risks to life, property, and critical natural and cultural resources. Emergency stabilization treatments reduce the risk of damage caused by floods, landslides, debris flows, and erosion, each of which can severely impact clean water supplies.

The need for S. 235 and H.R. 167 is especially acute. Climate change is resulting in drier and hotter weather, more intense and frequent droughts, and low snowpack that, taken together, are increasing the vulnerability of forests, woodland, and rangeland to fire. This danger is particularly critical in the western U.S., where the National Climate Assessment predicts that over the next 50 years, the area burned by wildfires will double in the southern Rockies and increase by as much as 74 percent in California as wildfire seasons become longer and more damaging.¹ All Western U.S. forests are particularly vulnerable to increased wildfire outbreaks

¹ National Climate Assessment, by the National Climate Assessment and Development Advisory Committee, Washington D.C., May 6, 2014.

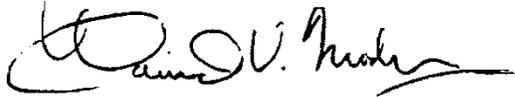
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in the future due to drought.² Persistent drought and accumulation of hazardous fuels has contributed to an increase in the number, size, and severity of large wildfires.³

In addition to these climate-induced factors, wildfire risk levels have increased as a result of population growth and home construction in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and the Intermix.⁴ This rapid growth into wildland areas complicates landscape protection needs and creates additional sources of ignition.

The passage of S. 235 and H.R. 167 would assure funding for federal land managers to conduct planned hazardous fuel reduction activities and to address land stabilization needs, regardless of the need for wildfire suppression funding in any given year. We strongly support their passage.

Sincerely,



David Modeer
Chair
Western Urban Water Coalition

cc: Perkins Coie LLP
700 Thirteenth St. NW, Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20005-3960

²*Id.*

³ Jennifer R. Marlon, et al., Long-term perspective on wildfires in the western USA, Proceedings of the National Academies of Science, published ahead of print February 14, 2012, www.pnas.org/lookup/suppl/doi:10.1073/pnas.1112839109/-

⁴ 2009 Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture Quadrennial Fire and Fuels Review. Interface generally refers to areas with communities near wildlands, while Intermix has fewer houses and more vegetation.