



# The Lookout

Information, Observations and Comments from the  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

*Sustaining the Heritage*

---

Volume 4 Issue 2  
March 3, 2009

## A SPECIAL EDITION

This is our first attempt at a special edition for the purpose of keeping you informed of current issues NAFSR leadership feels are of significant importance to the Forest Service and National Forests. Key issues are summarized and where possible sources of more information will be provided. Let us know if this effort is useful, and how we can improve Special Editions.

### **Forest Service to Interior—GAO study:**

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) study of moving the Forest Service to Interior, requested by Congressman Norm Dicks (D-WA), was presented to Congress February 24, 2009. GAO described pluses and minuses of such a move, but no overwhelming reason for a move. However, the report did suggest actions that could be taken to improve cooperation and coordination between agencies. This is the latest in a series of studies that have been carried out over the years looking at relocating the Forest Service.

The GAO report is available at: <http://www.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-09-223>, and an expanded summary is found in Public Land News, February 27, 2009 edition.

## **ECONOMIC STIMULUS BILL:**

The Forest service share of funding from the Stimulus Bill totals \$1.15 billion (\$650 million for construction on public lands and \$500 million for reducing wildfire threats on federal and non federal lands.) \$250 million of the fire money is to be funneled to state and private lands to reduce fire risks and improve forest health. Up to \$50 million of funding can be used for grants to increase wood to energy use on all lands.

The Forest Service has established special teams to help it meet the tremendous workloads created by the Stimulus goal of helping improve the Nation's economy by creating jobs. For more current information about the Forest Service Stimulus program management see:

[http://fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_RU4?ss=119994&navtype=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&navid=0910000000000000&pnavid=null&ttype=main&cid=null&position=QUICKLINKS&pname=Economic%20Recovery-Home](http://fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_RU4?ss=119994&navtype=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&navid=0910000000000000&pnavid=null&ttype=main&cid=null&position=QUICKLINKS&pname=Economic%20Recovery-Home).

## **FY 09 and FY10 Budgets:**

With so much public and media attention focused on the Stimulus legislation, the lack of a Federal FY 09 Budget is often overlooked. Most federal agencies have been operating on a continuing resolution since October 1, 2008.

On February 25, 2009 the House passed a \$410 billion omnibus FY 09 appropriations measure, which includes funding increases for most Forest Service programs. National Forest System's budget, for example, increases by \$40.2 million to \$1.510 billion. BLM also fairs well in this budget legislation.

However, the Senate may not be as generous. Some legislators are concerned about regular budget increases when the agencies are tasked with managing large amounts of Stimulus funding. The appropriations bill may have Senate action during the middle of March.

The FY 10 budget process is underway, but it is too early for details. However, here is a statement from the President's FY 10 budget message:

### **OUR NATION'S NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Protects the nation's forests.** The President is committed to protecting and restoring our national forests. The Budget provides \$50 million increase (plus inflation) for national forest operations to protect natural resources and maintain facilities.

**Responsibly budgets for wildfires.** The Budget fully funds the 10-year average suppression costs including \$282 million discretionary funding contingent reserve when the \$1.1 billion appropriated 10-year average is exhausted.

**Conserves new lands.**

The Budget includes \$119 million, a \$34 million increase, in Forest Service funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire easements on forested lands under significant development pressures.

**Supports conservation.** The Administration funds several vital conservation programs including the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Conservation Reserve Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

### **Firefighting Funding:**

George Leonard represented NAFSR in a coalition of some 40 major conservation organizations concerned about the funding of firefighting. The coalition members have signed off on a set of principles they recommend to Congress for use in resolving the funding issue. Here are the principles and associated recommendations.

#### *Principles:*

*Two principles are essential counter-parts to the recommendations that follow:*

*1. Investment: Investment of funds into the range of agency programs that have been impacted by increasing suppression costs must occur for agencies to accomplish their missions; and*

*2. Cost-Containment: The Forest service and DOI must continue developing and implementing a rigorous set of reassures for linking fire management to fire costs in order to more effectively achieve cost containment.*

#### *Key Recommendations:*

*Create a portioned wildfire suppression account to fund emergency fires.*

*The creation of this separate account must be accompanied by the following:*

*Non-emergency agency budgets (FS and DOI) shall not be impacted by emergency spending; and*

*Replace the 10 year rolling average (fire costs) with a more predictive statistical modeling approach that utilizes current weather, drought, fuel load as well as fire history and other data to project the extent of wildland fire on the landscape and economic modeling to predict the funding needed to address it.*

**A list of the organizations signing this statement is available from the editor.**

Indications are the FLAME Bill( to correct firefighting funding) that passed the House in 2008, but not the Senate, may be reintroduced this year. It addresses most of the items mentioned in the statement of principles.

### **Fire policy:**

Al West, retired Deputy Chief, and his committee are working on their report about fire policy issues, and it should be ready for comment in the near future. The Lookout will distribute the report as soon as it is available.

### **National Forests and Water:**

The importance of national forests to the Nation's water supply is often overlooked in discussions of growing shortages of domestic and industrial water supplies. Even agricultural interests often forget to acknowledge where the water comes from before it gets to the streams and reservoirs providing their irrigation water. However, the awareness of the critical role the forests play in supplying water is finally getting starting to get public attention.

Here are two examples:

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, a non profit advocate for rural communities and natural resource conservation and use, is active in most forested areas of the United States; headlined in their Rural Green Initiative for Stimulus funding the value of water from the national forests. Based upon economic research from the Forest Service the value of water from the national forests is \$27 billion per year.

In a late January 2009 address to the Colorado Water Congress, Regional Forester Rick Cables told the gathering that in his view the top three resource issues for Rocky Mountain National Forests were water, water, and water. In separate media reports there is a growing interest by Colorado water agencies to find funding to assist the Forest Service protect the forest watersheds.

Watch for more discussion of the importance of national forests to the Nation's water supply.

**The Lookout** is published by the National Association of Forest Service Retirees. Editors are John Marker ([jf37m@aol.com](mailto:jf37m@aol.com)) and Darrel Kenops ([dkenops@msn.com](mailto:dkenops@msn.com)) Mail address is: 6681 Highway 35, Mt Hood, OR 97041