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SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE AND INTERIOR PRAISE CREATION OF "FLAME" WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION RESERVE FUND

WASHINGTON, Friday, Nov. 6, 2009- Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today applauded the passage of legislation creating the FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund. This new wildfire suppression legislation will help the USDA Forest Service and DOI manage wildland fires safely and effectively, while simultaneously diminishing the need to transfer funds from other important programs and services. President Obama signed the legislation October 30.

"The Obama Administration is committed to conserving and protecting America's forests, and we are grateful for Congress' work to create a stable means to fund wildland fire management," Secretary Vilsack said. "Creation of the Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund enables safe and effective management of wildland fires without pulling resources away from other environmental priorities, such as clean, abundant water and safe, healthy communities." "This is an important and cost-effective step forward in managing the high cost of firefighting while reducing the impact to other critical natural resource programs," said Secretary Salazar. "It also represents a foundation for a strategic plan to achieve fire-adapted communities while protecting citizens and critical natural resources."

Congress created the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund as part of the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (PL 111-88). The act appropriates approximately \$2.1 billion to the USDA Forest Service and \$795 million to DOI for wildland fire management. In addition, the act creates the FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund that provides an additional \$413 million to the USDA Forest Service and \$61 million to DOI to cover costs of suppressing large, complex wildfires that meet certain criteria and to replenish wildland fire management funds if they are depleted.

Since 2002, the USDA Forest Service has transferred more than \$2 billion from other Forest Service programs to help cover the costs of suppressing wildfires. While the transfers enabled the agency to continue wildfire operations, fund transfers had detrimental effects on other agency programs, even when the transfer funds were repaid through supplemental appropriations. The FLAME Reserve Account is the right step in recognizing that the truly catastrophic nature of many wildland fires in this country. The Fund will help reduce the funding of fire operations

from other non-fire accounts. The agencies will continue to place high priority on cost containment and fiscal accountability as implementation proceeds. Since FLAME legislation was introduced in March 2009, a diverse coalition of more than 80 interest groups has organized to support passage of the legislation.

Over the last ten years, an average of more than 72,000 wildfires per year has burned more than 6.5 million acres of land throughout the United States.

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