



**American Forest Resource Council**  
5100 S.W. Macadam Avenue, Suite 350  
Portland, Oregon 97239  
Phone: (503) 222-9505  
Fax: (503) 222-3255  
E-mail: [info@amforest.org](mailto:info@amforest.org)  
[www.amforest.org](http://www.amforest.org)

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## **Vilsack Report—Spot On!**

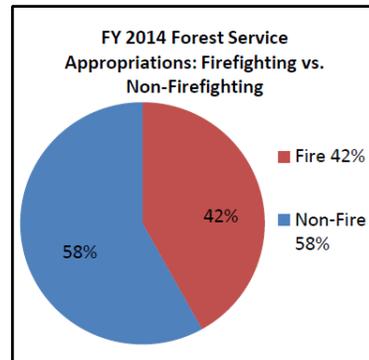
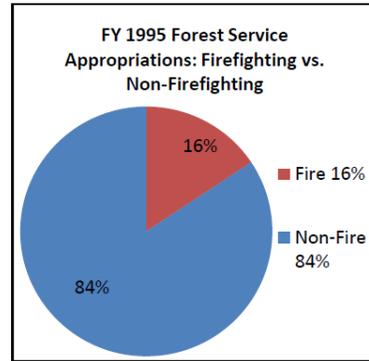
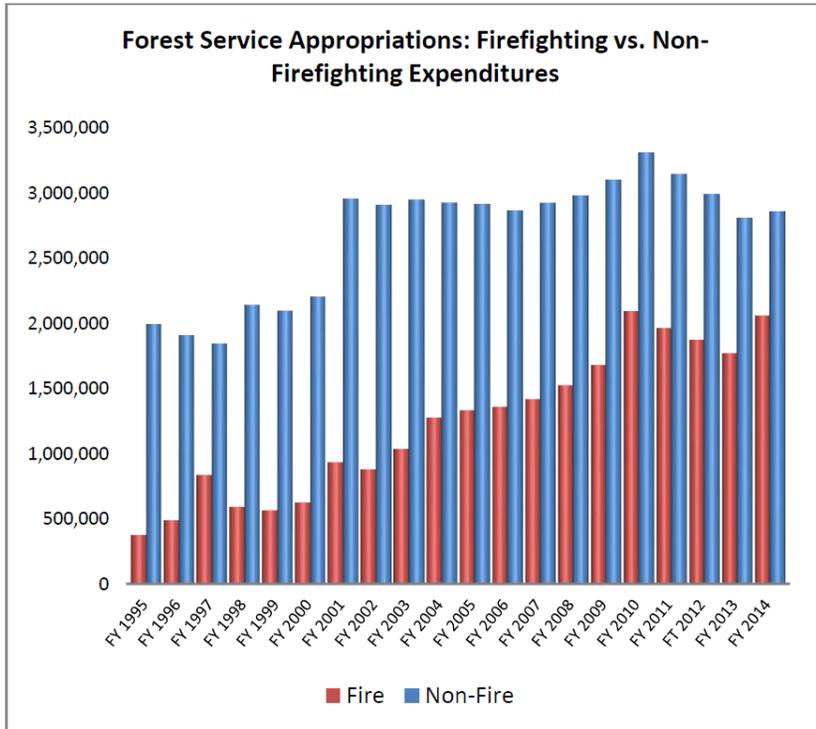
In August, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack released a report titled “[The Rising Cost of Fire Operations: Effects on the Forest Service’s Non-Fire Work](#).” This report is an excellent recount of how the Forest Service has gone from a land management agency to a firefighting agency. One has to only look at this year’s fire season to realize that even though slightly over 3,000,000 acres were burned, the Forest Service spent its entire fire budget (42% of their total budget) on extinguishing their portions of those wildfires. Less forest treatments are taking place on the ground and the fires that are occurring are more catastrophic in size, severity, and cost.

The agency is out of balance on its priorities and focus on managing their forest lands. They have gone from the Forest Service to the Fire Service. Secretary Vilsack and his staff understand that something has to change to turn this trend around to once again let foresters manage the land rather than fire.

Vilsack stated in his opening paragraph of the report that “The increasing cost of fighting wildland fire has had a negative and lasting impact on the Forest Service’s non-fire, mission critical activities. In particular, the growth in fire expenditures has resulted in two significant and negative impacts on the Forest Service budget: (1) fire borrowing; and (2) a long-term shift of agency resources to fire expenditures.”

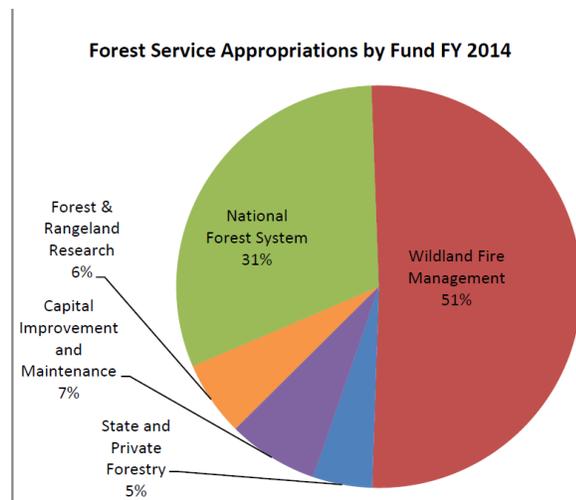
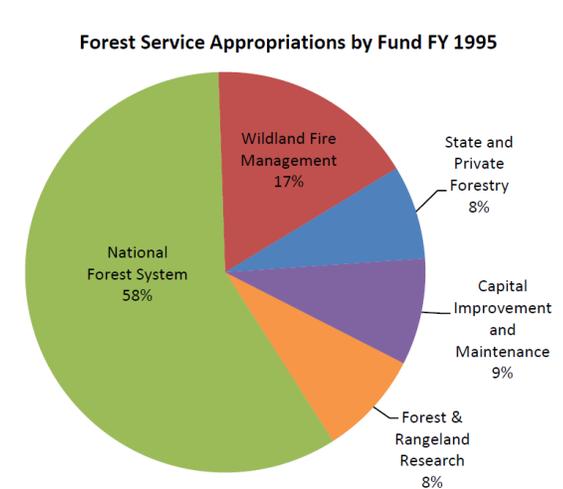
Included in the report are some outstanding data and graphs that show the historical appropriations to the various Forest Service programs and paints a clear picture of the problem.

The charts on the following page show how the agency’s appropriations in firefighting versus non-firefighting activities have changed from 1995 to 2014. The funding level in fire preparedness, suppression and FLAME alone has increased from 16 percent of the Forest Service budget in 1995 to 42 percent of the budget in 2014. This does not take into account hazardous fuels management, fire research, joint fire science, state fire assistance and volunteer fire assistance, which throws the total fire related budget line items to over 50%.



Note: The above charts compare Suppression + Preparedness + FLAME to the rest of the Forest Service Budget.

These side by side charts point out the percentage of the Forest Service budget that went to the National Forest System for management. In 1995 it was 58% and decreased to only 31% in 2014. While Wildland Fire Management increased from 17% to 51% during those years.



Since 2001, appropriations for vegetation and watershed management programs have been reduced by 22%. As Vilsack stated “The Vegetation and Watershed Management Program is the cornerstone for forest, rangeland, soil and water restoration and enhancement activities on National Forest System (NFS) lands and plays a key role in post-fire restoration. The reductions have limited the agency’s ability to prevent and limit the spread of invasive species; to decrease the backlog of deforestation and young stand management needs; and to lessen the severity and extent of insect, disease and fire prone forest stands.”

The final piece of the management puzzle is the ability to access the land and manage it. With less vegetative management taking place and less harvest occurring, there has been a decreased use of forest roads by contractors. Contractors historically have provided a good portion of the maintenance on Forest Service roads during the past few decades. In addition to not having woods contractors to help maintain forest roads, the Forest Service has reduced their Roads funding by 46%. The reduction in Roads funding has had a negative impact on the agency’s ability to meet critical access, safety, and restoration needs.

### *Congress Needs to Act*

The Vilsack report clearly points out the problems facing the Forest Service and their inability to manage the land. Congress needs to help bring management back to these forested lands, reduce the threat of fire, and make sure the cost of fighting fire does not impact other work in the forest through fire borrowing.

There are several bills in Congress that could help provide many of the fixes for the agency. It is possible that Congress could act on one or more of these bills when they return for the lame duck session so the agency doesn’t have to face the same fate next summer. Bills that are currently in play include:

- HR 1526, “Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities.” This bill has passed the full House of Representatives twice.
- S. 1966, “National Forest Management and Jobs Act of 2014.” This bill has been introduced in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Both of these bills would assist the Forest Service in doubling the acres currently being treated in forest management projects, address the “analysis paralysis” by streamlining hurdles found in NEPA planning and consultation, return additional revenues back to the counties, and make it harder for environmental groups to litigate projects.

In addition several bills have been introduced to provide adequate wildfire suppression funding and prevent fire borrowing. Those include:

- S. 1875, the “Wildfire Disaster Funding Act” sponsored by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Mike Crapo (R-ID).
- H.R. 3992, the “Wildfire Funding Disaster Act” sponsored by Congressmen Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Mike Simpson (R-ID).

Both of these bills would allow the Government to dip into disaster funds when firefighting costs exceed 70% of the 10-year average budget in any given year.

- S. 2539, the “FLAME Act Amendments Act of 2014” sponsored by Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Jeff Flake (R-AZ) and John Barrasso (R-WY).

This bill is intended to offer an alternative to the Wildfire Funding Disaster Act. It would require the Forest Service and Department of Interior to budget for 100% of their suppression costs using the most accurate budget forecast model available, provide the agencies access to emergency spending to prevent fire borrowing, and place a greater focus on forest management to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

When Congress returns in November they should act to take steps to restore the health of our national forests, and the looming catastrophic wildfire disaster we face with each fire season. / *Tom Partin*

### Western Regions Timber Performance

The initial tallies for the Forest Service’s 2014 timber program are listed below. Most programs in the west appeared to have performed pretty well. All figures are approximate since final numbers aren’t reported until October 31, but they shouldn’t change significantly.

#### 2014 NFS Timber Program (MCCF) as of 10/27/2014 NOT FINAL

	R1	R4	R5	R6
<b>FY 2014 Timber Program Funding Allocation</b>				
NFTM			\$37,681	\$46,409
NFRR	\$24,842	\$10,105		
SSSS	\$3,552	\$1,095	\$2,047	\$4,125
CWK2	\$1,500	\$500	\$3,000	\$4,000
<b>Total FY 2014 Timber Program Funding</b>	\$29,894	\$11,700	\$42,728	\$54,534
FY 14 Timber Target (mccf)	570.0	230.0	1,000.0	1,160.0
FY 14 NFTM, NFRR, SSSS, CWK2 Accompl (mccf)	496.5	202.5	568.2	1,112.5
FY 14 CFLR Funded Accompl (mccf)	70.1	21.3	2.6	31.2
FY 14 Total Timber Accompl (mccf)	566.6	223.8	570.8	1,143.7
Accomp %*	99.4%	97.3%	57.1%	98.6%

- Region 1, under the direction of Regional Forester Faye Krueger, will hit 100% of their 285 mmbf target with add on volume. This is up significantly from the last few years due to litigation that has crippled their program. However, 77.1 mmbf of their target for 2014 is tied up in litigation as lawsuits are still prevalent in the Region. In 2012 the Region hit 75% of their target and in 2013 they only hit 63%. The Region has put together a program that expects volumes to ramp up by 10 mmbf per year for the next three years.
- In Region 4, Regional Forester Nora Rasure's target was 112 mmbf and they met over 97% and would have achieved 107% but some sales went no bid. For 2015, AFRC is watching possible litigation on the Payette National Forest, due to objections that have been filed on the Lost Creek, Boulder Creek Project which could impact that program.
- In Region 5, Regional Forester Randy Moore had projected that they would have a 500 mmbf program, with salvage from the Rim, American, and Aspen fires making up about 80% of the volume. These salvage projects were primarily in the southern part of the Region and the green program, (mostly in the northern forests) was 100 mmbf. Unfortunately the salvage program fell short of projections and only a total of 265 mmbf was sold in 2014. Litigation is ongoing on the Rim fire and several other projects in the northern part of the state.
- Region 6 began the year under the direction of Regional Forester Kent Connaughton, who retired and was replaced late in the year by Jim Pena. The target for the Region was 603 mmbf, and they will finish close to that number once add on volume is figured in. Litigation is ongoing on the Mt. Hood, Umatilla, Umpqua, Wallowa-Whitman, and Willamette National Forests. Region 6 has asked for a 10% increase in their timber program for 2015, making their target nearly 670 mmbf.

Trends in most western Regions appear to be on the rise for getting acres treated, thus more volume to the market, which must happen if the Forest Service is to achieve Chief Tom Tidwell's goal of selling 3.1 bbf of timber in FY15. AFRC and our members appreciated the hard work! */Tom Partin*

## YTD Wildfire Statistics

This table shows the wildfire statistics for the past three years and 10-year average figures. While the past two years reflect that acres burned are down, both years saw the Forest Service tap into fire borrowing. For the 2014 fire season the Forest Service emergency firefighting expenses exceeded appropriations by \$200 million. A transfer was avoided this year because they were able to use funds out of fire suppression reserves. Last year the agency had to borrow \$600 million to pay for additional firefighting costs. The fiscal year ended September 30. */Tom Partin*

<b>Year-to-date statistics</b>		
2014 (1/1/14 - 10/10/14)	Fires: 41,790	Acres: 3,070,737
2013 (1/1/13 - 10/10/13)	Fires: 40,070	Acres: 4,146,336
2012 (1/1/12 - 10/10/12)	Fires: 49,682	Acres: 8,862,671
<b>Annual average prior 10 years</b>		
2004-2013	Fires: 62,864	Acres: 6,796,329

## **Western Oregon Wildfire Summary**

Several wildfires burned on federal forest land in Western Oregon during the summer of 2014. Although none were as extensive as last year's Douglas Complex fire, the effects of many of these fires will present opportunities for both the Forest Service and the BLM to conduct timber salvage.

The Oregon Gulch Fire affected O&C and Public Domain timberlands on both the Lakeview and Medford BLM districts. The total area damaged by the fire is estimated to be 35,101 acres; of which 4,870 acres are managed by the Klamath Falls Resource Area and 2,425 acres are managed by the Ashland Resource Area. Both districts have initiated the planning process that will consider salvage operations on many of these acres. At present, approximately 3,000 acres are being analyzed with an anticipated output of 25-30 mmbf. The majority (75%) of the affected timber volume is pine species (ponderosa & sugar), with the remainder primarily in Douglas-fir.

The Salem BLM District also experienced a fire on their O&C lands this summer. The 36-Pit Fire burned 5,521 acres near the town of Estacada, of which 1,300 were on BLM Matrix lands. The remainder was on the Mt. Hood National Forest and private land. The BLM district and national forest has yet to formally initiate a proposal for salvage. However, the Cascades Resource Area is currently considering several analysis methods, such as Categorical Exclusions, to salvage portions of the affected acres to capture what timber volume is available and to get their O&C lands back on a sustained yield trajectory.

The Onion Mountain Fire (4,106 acres) and the Deception Complex Fire (6,033 acres) affected lands managed by the Rogue-Siskiyou and Willamette National Forests respectively. The Onion Mountain Fire, which burned on the Wild Rivers Ranger District, occurred primarily on lands designated as Matrix by the Northwest Forest Plan, which emphasizes economic recovery of forest products damaged by wildfire. The Deception Fire, which burned on the Middle Fork District near the town of Oakridge, occurred entirely on lands designated as Late-Successional Reserves. Both forests have completed reports outlining the effects of the fires and what recovery actions are possible. Among those actions is consideration of timber salvage. /Andy Geissler

## **Moist Mixed Conifer Publication**

On October 15, the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station announced the publication of [\*The Ecology and Management of Moist Mixed-Conifer Forests in Eastern Oregon and Washington: A Synthesis of the Relevant Biophysical Science and Implications for Future Land Management\*](#).

The report reviews existing moist mixed conifer (MMC) research across multiple natural resource issues—including disturbance regimes, past management effects, silvicultural management options, wildlife habitat, and social and policy concerns. It contains information on the current wood processing infrastructure and capacity for forest restoration and on biomass utilization. Printed copies can be requested by emailing [pnw\\_pnwpubs@fs.fed.us](mailto:pnw_pnwpubs@fs.fed.us) or calling (503) 261-1211 and referencing "PNW-GTR-897."

In an era when "best available scientific information" is the lynchpin for both upholding and challenging federal forest projects, this publication should prove to be an important reference. /Ann Forest Burns

## Wood Innovation Funding Grants

On October 27, the Forest Service published a [Request for Proposals](#) in the Federal Register inviting applications for its 2015 Wood Innovation Funding Opportunity Grants. It plans to grant a total of \$5 million under the competitive process. The maximum award will be \$250,000, with a 35% non-federal match required. The deadline for grant applications is January 23, 2015.

Eligible applicants are for-profit entities; state, local, and tribal governments; school districts; communities; not-for-profit organizations; or special purpose districts (e.g., public utilities districts, fire districts, conservation districts, or ports).

According to the Federal Register notice, the RFP focuses on three priorities: “Reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health on National Forest System and other forest lands; reduce costs of forest management on all land types; and promote economic and environmental health of communities.” Awards will be focused in two major categories: Expansion of wood energy markets that depend on forest residues or byproducts; and expansion of wood products markets for commercial building and innovative wood products.

A pre-application webinar will be held November 5 at 10:00 a.m. PST. The link for the seminar is: <https://www.livemeeting.com/cc/usda/join?id=BGW262&role=attend&pw=tK-%287%26Dwt>.

Anyone interested in this opportunity should refer to the Federal Register notice which includes contacts in each Forest Service region. /*Ann Forest Burns*

## Hal Salwasser

Oregon State University Forestry Dean Emeritus Hal Salwasser passed away on October 15. He served as Dean from 2000 to 2012 and had planned to retire from the faculty at the end of this year.

Hal contributed greatly to the success of Oregon State University as a premier institution for training field foresters. He was the first to hold the Cheryl Ramberg and Allyn C. Ford Deanship of the College of Forestry.

Prior to coming to OSU, Hal served as Station Director for the Southwest Forest and Range Experimental Station and as Northern Regional Forester. He earned his PhD in forest wildlife from the University of California, Berkley.

A celebration of Hal’s life will be held on November 2 at 12:30 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 1165 NW Monroe Avenue, Corvallis. There will also be a celebration of life on the OSU campus, on Wednesday, December 3 from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. in the CH2M HILL Alumni Center Ballroom.

Hal’s voice will be greatly missed in the forestry community. /*Tom Partin*