

Testimony of
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Regarding the US Forest Service (Joint Fire Science Program) FY 2017 Budget

To the
House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

March 17, 2016

The Ecological Society of America, the Society of Range Management, Association of Fire Ecologists, and the Forest Stewards Guild appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony about the fiscal year (FY) 2017 budget US Forest Service (USFS) funding for the Joint Fire Science Program. We are concerned that the Administration's 2017 USFS budget request cuts funding for the Joint Fire Science Program's (JFSP) budget by \$6.194 million within its Wildland Fire Management budget. Instead, the Service has designated \$3 million for the Joint Fire Science Program from the \$292 million Forest and Rangeland Research account without increasing its funding. **We request that the US Forest Service restore the Joint Fire Science Program budget of \$6.194 million under the Wildland Fire Management budget and fully fund the Forest and Rangeland Research program.**

We applaud the Subcommittee's past leadership in funding wildland fire research within the US Department of Interior and the US Forest Service that is responsive to the needs of fire and fuel managers throughout the country.

As you know, the frequency, severity, and size of fires have increased substantially in the continental US since the 1980s, and this trend is projected to continue and intensify in the future. The risk to communities, the cost of property loss, and the expense to cover the damage brought by these fires will consequently also grow. Scientific research has been critical to understanding and properly responding to these wildfires in the most productive and cost-effective manner possible.

The JFSP was created by Congress in 1998 as an interagency research, development, and applications partnership between the US Department of the Interior and the US Department of Agriculture. The program solicits proposals from scientists who compete for funding through a rigorous peer-review process to ensure the highest quality projects are funded. Over 90 colleges and universities across the United States have collaborated or partnered with JFSP-sponsored research projects. The JFSP also runs a model program in science communication, with very effective efforts to put science in the hands of managers and policy makers.

No other federal program except the JFSP provides the integration of science and management needed to face the challenges that lie ahead—we will be living in a world with more fire. Research in fire science is crucial to anticipating how ecosystems and landscapes may change in the future, how fire should be managed in both wildlands and developed areas, and where mitigation or adaptation strategies are most appropriate. Reductions in support for JFSP are inconsistent with high-priority national research needs.

For much of the past ten years, the US Forest Service has had to borrow from other accounts within the Service to cover expenses of mitigating the increasing costs of wildfires nationwide. While the Society understands the need to consolidate resources to improve the effectiveness of federal fire response efforts, it seems counterproductive to cut funding towards applied research that will help agencies improve wildfire coordination and response efforts.

We appreciate that the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies has made funding for policy-relevant wildfire science among your highest priorities. We hope you will continue to recognize the critical role the JFSP plays in these efforts.