



National Association of Conservation Districts

September 18, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. President, Secretary Vilsack, Secretary Jewell, and Director Donovan:

The catastrophic wildfires engulfing western states this summer are further proof of the need for the Administration to support the management of our nation's forestlands through a collaborative effort of Congress, federal agencies, industry and the local residents most directly affected by these fires.

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents the nation's 3,000 conservation districts and their governing boards. Established under state law, conservation districts are local units of government charged with carrying out natural resource management programs created or adjusted based on local needs. Conservation districts are directly connected to local populations and landowners.

Conservation districts work with federal, state, tribal and other local agencies to provide technical assistance to landowners and other partners to address natural resource issues. With respect to forests and grasslands, conservation districts are involved in a wide range of activities, including non-industrial private forest management, wildfire prevention and fuels reduction, biomass production and utilization, forest pest management, wildlife habitat management and urban forestry.

Recently, the Okanogan Conservation District proved to be an invaluable resource in assisting FEMA and state and federal land management agencies with rapid emergency response during the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire in Washington State. The district assisted with the identification and evaluation of priority areas in need of immediate recovery, and provided conservation for both private and public lands. The 2015 fires far surpass the area burned in 2014 and conservation districts are already formulating plans to deal with the aftermath.

It is critical that federal policies support the uninhibited flow of vital information between agencies and partners that will allow natural resource concerns to be addressed, private and public property protected, and all life, especially human, fully cared for.

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Battling wildfires requires organization and boots on the ground, conservation districts, like many conservation partners, play a critical role in the fight by helping limit the reach of those fires before they happen. Fire suppression policies in the past have resulted in an excessive buildup of fuels, particularly in woody plant communities. This situation increases the danger to lives and property from wildfires, creates other environmental problems such as reduced groundwater recharge, reduces wildlife habitat and grazing, and reduces vegetative diversity. Federal agencies should adopt policies and programs that encourage appropriate brush management, including controlled burning.

NACD fully supports increased funding for wildfire prevention, management and restoration of our public forests and rangelands; legislation that expedites analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act; policies and budgets that allow for effective prescribed fire, pre-suppression activity and silvicultural treatments; and increased pre- and post-fire grazing on at-risk public lands. A similar letter has been sent to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the Senate and House Committees on Interior Appropriations.

Sincerely,



Lee McDaniel
President

CC:

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The Honorable Thomas Tidwell
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