



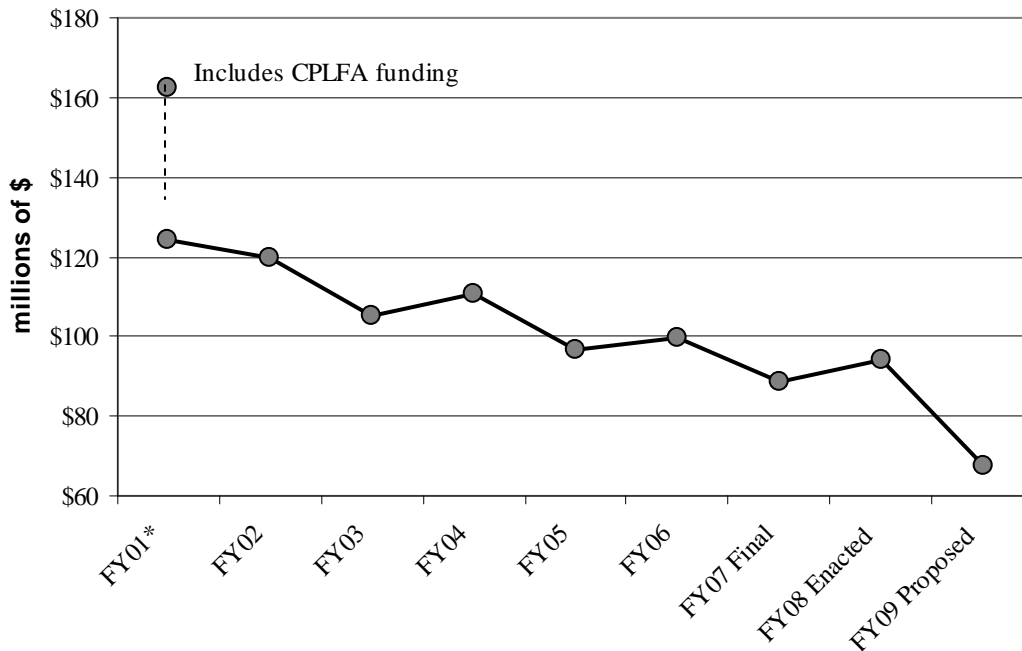
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Community Fire Assistance Budget Significantly Reduced in FY2009

While fire management is often perceived as a federal issue, fires do not respect jurisdictional lines. Safe communities and healthy landscapes go hand-in-hand - research¹ has shown that up to 85% of the land around communities that is at the highest wildfire risk is non-federal. That means wildland fire management must occur at the landscape scale, with federal agencies partnering with states and communities, and scarce resources must be spent where they are needed most – near those communities. In 2001, the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior identified over 11,000 communities adjacent to federal lands that are at risk from wildland fire.² State Foresters conservatively estimate at over 51,000 communities at risk.³ The scope of the problem is clearly enormous - and growing. Experts predict that almost eight million new homes will be built in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) between 2005 and 2010.⁴ Increased population in the WUI is one of the primary reasons suppression costs have skyrocketed to over \$1 billion per year. Communities that are “firesafe”, or well-prepared for fire, are key to reducing these suppression costs – and ultimately restoring functional, and fire-resilient, wildlands. However, funding for these programs has trended downward since FY 2001 and that trend continues with the Administration’s FY2009 Budget request, which proposes to slash these programs even further – by 27%.

Community Fire Assistance Funding FY 2001-FY2009

(does not include supplementals; adjusted to 2005 dollars)



*One community fire assistance program, the Community and Private Land Fire Assistance program, was only funded for one year, FY 2001.

¹ Aplet, G.H. and Wilmer, B. (2003). *The Wildland Fire Challenge: Focus on Reliable Data, Community Protection, and Ecological Restoration*. The Wilderness Society.

² 66 FR 43384-43435

³ Southern Group of State Foresters, *Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Final Report (2006)*, p. 75.

⁴ Forest Service and Department of the Interior “Quadrennial Fire and Fuel Report” (2005).

The Administration's Budget for FY 2009 will short-cut critical community fire assistance programs and ultimately sends the message that the goal of safer communities is not a top priority. In the face of a changing climate that will likely bring more fires, as well as an ever-expanding wildland-urban interface, this is the wrong answer. Compounding these cuts is a drastic 58% reduction to the State and Private Forestry budget as a whole, an additional blow to private landowners. In total, the FY 2009 budget proposes a 27% reduction in community fire assistance funding from FY 2008 enacted levels. Already woefully underfunded, State Fire Assistance is proposed for a 25.5% cut in the fiscal year 2009 budget, from \$80.6 million to \$60 million.⁵ Volunteer Fire Assistance, which targets rural communities with populations under 10,000, is proposed for a 6% reduction – from \$13.8 million to \$13 million.⁶ The BLM's Rural Fire Assistance program is once again being proposed for elimination. The Rural Fire Assistance Program provides financial support to local and rural fire protection districts that protect small communities, and often provides critical service in helping meet the protection needs for wildland urban interface areas threatened by wildfire.

Protecting communities threatened by wildland fire is recognized as the highest priority of federal fire policy. Yet, agency budgets suggest otherwise. With suppression costs eating away at more and more of the Forest Service budget and the wildland-urban interface growing bigger every year, it's more important than ever that we change the way we think about fire management. To make saving homes and lives truly the top priority, we need policies that put scarce dollars where they are needed most – in and around communities – not continued cuts to critical programs like State Fire Assistance.

Community Fire Assistance
values are in millions of dollars

BLM	FY 2008 enacted	FY 2009 proposed	Percent change from FY08 to FY09
<i>Wildland Fire Management</i>			
Rural Fire Assistance	5.91	0	-100%
USFS			
<i>Wildland Fire Management</i>			
NFP State Fire Assistance	47.97	35	-27%
NFP Volunteer Fire Assistance	7.88	8	2%
NFP Economic Action Program	0	0	0
<i>State and Private Forestry</i>			
<i>Cooperative Fire Assistance</i>			
State Fire Assistance	32.61	25	-23%
Volunteer Fire Assistance	5.91	5	-15%
TOTAL	100.28	73	-27%

For More Information Contact: Jaelith Hall-Rivera, Wildfire Policy Analyst, jaelith_rivera@twc.org, 202-429-2676

⁵ These figures combine SFA line items in State and Private Forestry and Wildland Fire Management.

⁶ These figures combine VFA line items in State and Private Forestry and Wildland Fire Management.