

# **State Fire Assistance**

## *Key to Successful Comprehensive Wildfire Management*

**State Fire Assistance (SFA) is a key part of a long-term strategy to reduce wildfire suppression costs** by providing funds for proactive community planning, fuels mitigation, preparedness, and education.

Projects results from SFA include:

- ❖ Preparedness funds that help ensure faster local response to wildland fires, including those on federal lands, so that fewer fires become large, needing costly federal suppression actions. Since FY02, nearly 200,000 wildland firefighters have received specific inter-agency training.
- ❖ On-the-ground high-priority hazard mitigation projects in communities at risk to help achieve the goals of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act by treating hazardous fuels where most necessary – in the WUI – reducing the need for costly, and dangerous, fire suppression near homes. Since FY02, over 470,000 acres of hazardous fuels have been treated in and around communities using SFA funding.
- ❖ The Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment, developed by the Southern Group of State Foresters, is a comprehensive planning tool to prioritize projects - allowing scarce resources to be used needed most.
- ❖ Community Wildfire Protection Plans that cover 4,762 communities to help prioritize fire mitigation efforts.
- **State Fire Assistance bridges the gap between communities and federal agencies.** Over 51,000 communities have been identified at-risk from wildland fire; SFA brings federal agencies together with states and communities to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
- **State Fire Assistance generates a positive return on federal investment.** Federal SFA funds are matched dollar-for-dollar. In many cases, matching contributions exceed the required amount. Further, state and local governments provide a significant amount of the resources used to fight fires on federal land, potentially upwards of 15-20 %. In 2007, state resources mobilized for federal wildland fires included 1,300 aircraft, 3,200 pieces of equipment, 2,400 crew personnel, and 23 incident management teams. SFA allows States and local governments to make their resources available to the federal government at half the cost.
- **State Fire Assistance helps states effectively partner with one another.** States work with one another through interstate compacts and cooperative agreements. These agreements are at-risk when SFA is reduced.
- **State Fire Assistance is declining, while the wildfire threat continues to increase.** Funding for SFA has decreased since FY04 and in FY05-FY07 the President's Budget recommended yearly cuts of over \$20 million. For FY09, the President's Budget proposes a drastic 25.5% cut to this already underfunded program.
- **State Fire Assistance already falls short of the need and further declines threatens the ability of communities to protect themselves.** In FY06, the Forest Service reported assisting over 11,440 communities, only a fraction of the communities at risk. At current funding levels, assuming a conservative 51,162 communities-at risk-means each community would receive only a little over \$1,560, not nearly enough to accomplish meaningful fire planning, mitigation or preparedness.

The recently updated *10-year Strategy Implementation Plan* demonstrates the needed investment in SFA. SFA is the primary federal vehicle for community fire assistance – Goal IV of the 10-year strategy – which is the most important aspect of creating wildfire-ready communities in fire-adapted landscapes. Effective wildland fire management requires partnerships between agencies and communities, which can only occur with increased funding for State Fire Assistance and clearly coordinating fuel reduction on federal, state and private lands. The National Association of State Foresters estimates that **FY09 funding must be increased to \$145 million to ensure successful wildland fire preparedness and management across the landscape. While budget constraints may not support this increase, the number should be considered an accurate reflection of funding needs and much of it would be offset by suppression cost savings derived from the efficiency of state and local first responders in initial attack.**