

**Sponsors: California Municipal Utilities Association; Sacramento Municipal Utility District; Southern California Public Power Authority; Banning Electric Utility; Trinity Public Utility District; Northern California Power Agency; Washington Public Utility Districts Association; Irrigation and Electrical Districts Association of Arizona; Chelan County Public Utility District**

**In Support of Reducing Wildfire Risk by Adequately Funding Fire Suppression and Forest Health Programs**

1 Recent fires in the West have had a devastating impact on natural resources, property, and lives—  
2 including on public power facilities and employees. Wildfires have ravaged communities and left some  
3 local economies in ruins. The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates the total economic cost to  
4 communities caused by the 2018 wildfire season alone to be upwards of \$350 billion. While recently  
5 enacted changes to the way catastrophic wildfires are funded will generate benefits in the future, Congress  
6 must ensure immediate needs for fire suppression, prevention, and overall forest health are adequately  
7 funded.

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9 Large-scale, catastrophic fires throughout the Western U.S. are occurring with increasing frequency and  
10 severity. These fires touch the lives and operations of public power utilities, their employees, and the  
11 communities they serve. Generating units, transmission and distribution lines, communications  
12 equipment, and utility buildings traverse the 640 million acres of federal land in the U.S., making publicly  
13 owned utilities integral partners and stakeholders in reducing wildfire risk and promoting healthy, well-  
14 managed forests.

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16 Public power has long advocated for an overhaul to federal wildfire management policies and funding  
17 challenges. The flawed practice of “fire-borrowing”—in which the Forest Service uses funds from non-  
18 fire accounts to support fire suppression when costs exceed the amount appropriated for the year—was  
19 intended to be an extraordinary measure, but as fire seasons have grown more destructive and costly, it  
20 has become common practice year after year. Because this cycle continually decimated resources from  
21 programs essential to fire prevention and maintaining healthy forests, it has led to a pattern of more  
22 devastating fires and increased risks to infrastructure, wildlife, and human life.

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24 Legislation was enacted in 2018 to end the practice of fire-borrowing by establishing an emergency  
25 reserve account that the Forest Service can draw from instead of borrowing from non-fire programs.  
26 However, this fix does not come into effect until 2020. As a result, Congress must be prepared to swiftly  
27 approve supplemental appropriations for suppression costs to ensure other forest health programs are not  
28 raided yet again if 2019’s fire season proves as severe as recent years.

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30 New federal guidelines that will be implemented in 2019 regarding vegetation management in utility  
31 rights-of-way will help improve the safety of electrical infrastructure and reduce wildfire risk by  
32 streamlining the approval process for these activities. To maximize these benefits, the Forest Service,  
33 Bureau of Land Management, and other federal land managers must work closely with public power  
34 utilities to ensure the new guidelines are implemented effectively and efficiently.

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36 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:** That the American Public Power Association supports  
37 adequate funding for wildfire suppression to ensure existing forest management programs, including fire  
38 prevention and vegetation management practices, have the resources necessary to be implemented  
39 effectively, promote forest health, and reduce wildfire risk.