



Western Forestry Leadership Coalition

Delivering Resources, Partnerships, and Solutions for Western Forestry Challenges

Press Release



Coalition Report Reveals the True Costs of Wildland Fire to Communities and Economies

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Denver, CO (April 23, 2009). A new report by the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC) demonstrates that the true costs to society from large wildland fires are much greater than simply the costs of suppressing the fire and actions to reduce the impacts of wildfires are not only good for the environment, but good for the economy.

The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western U.S. examines already-existing data from six large wildland fires across the west in order to explore beyond the costs of suppression and give a more accurate account of the cost to communities and the environment. Since 2000, annual fire suppression costs for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior have exceeded \$1 billion. The report reveals that this number, while large, is merely a fraction of the true cost to society; the true costs being anywhere from 2 to 30 times higher than the more commonly reported suppression costs.

“The cost of a wildland fire simply starts with suppression – but it doesn’t end there,” says Pete Anderson, Co-chair of the WFLC and Nevada State Forster. “After a fire a community could experience long term economic impacts due to the loss of tourism, agricultural operations, and wildlife habitat. In these hard economic times, something like this will devastate a community.”

“True” cost considers long-term and complex costs, including impacts to watersheds, property damage, business and individual financial losses, flooding, erosion, diminished water and air quality, healthcare costs, injuries and fatalities, lost tax revenue, and a host of ecosystem service costs that extend well into the distant future.

“When we look at all the impacts that a large wildfire can have, it is obvious to see why a wise investment in preventing devastating wildfires make sense in every way,” states Bov Eav, director of the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station, whose staff conducts extensive research on the impacts of wildland fire.

The report offers a series of recommendations to help focus the way these costs might be better considered including: supporting improved data collection by government agencies to foster more effective budgeting, developing a new funding mechanism for emergency fire suppression activities that includes a partitioned account for wildfire suppression costs associated with emergencies, and investing in management activities that improve forest health.

For a copy of the report, please see: <http://www.wflcweb.org/infomaterials/reports.php>.

The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition is a unique state-federal partnership working with the people and resources in the west. The WFLC 34-person membership consists of western State and Territorial Forestry Agencies and the US Forest Service: western Regional Foresters, Research Station Directors, and the Forest Products Lab Director. The Coalition has staff support based in Denver, CO. Their mission is to promote science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests. For more information please visit www.wflcweb.org