

The Mountain Pact



October 31, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McConnell, Senator Reid, Speaker Ryan, and Representative Pelosi:

The Mountain Pact is a coalition of high-profile mountain towns in the American West working together to build economic and environmental resilience through a shared voice on federal policy. The Mountain Pact represents mountain communities across the American West, approximately 350,000 permanent residents and 80 million visitors each year.

Wildfires have become a major threat to the Western United States and the growing costs of wildfire suppression greatly affect our communities. Positioned in rural mountain areas and often surrounded by federal land, Western mountain communities are especially vulnerable to economic, public health, and environmental damages from catastrophic wildfire.

Wildfires continue to burn in the American West, with fires currently raging in Montana, California and much of the Southwest. So far in 2016, more than 30,000 fires have burned nearly 4.5 million acres. There are many factors that contribute to the increase in wildfire frequency and severity, including build-up of hazardous fuels, changes in water cycle regimes, ongoing drought, and climate change.

Last year, wildfires burned more than 10 million acres in the United States at a cost of \$2.1 billion in federal expenditures—the costliest year on record. As the fires continue to burn, the U.S. Forest Service expects that more than half of its budget will be devoted to wildfire suppression. With the rapidly growing costs of wildfire suppression, agencies are significantly underfunded



when it comes to proactive land management programs, including those that would help reduce the risk of future fires.

Our mountain communities depend on the USDA Forest Service and Department Of Interior for many aspects of forest and recreation management on our public lands in order for our tourism-based economies to thrive. Without the funding and resources to provide essential forest management support (beyond wildfire suppression) our most important economic-driving resource is at risk.

It is time to stop the eroding budgets facing the Department of the Interior and USDA Forest Service and fully fund both the programs essential to the health of our forests as well as the ever-rising costs of fire suppression.

For these reasons, we urge you to consider a comprehensive fire funding solution that: 1) minimizes the transfer of funds to pay for ever increasing costs of fighting wildfires; 2) allows access to disaster funding outside the agencies discretionary funds; and 3) addresses how the increasing ten-year average cuts into the USFS and DOI budgets.

We thank you for your attention to this important issue and we look forward to finding a comprehensive fire funding solution.

Sincerely,

Town of Vail, CO
Town of Crested Butte, CO
Town of Carbondale, CO
Town of Telluride, CO
Town of Ridgway, CO
City of Salt Lake, UT
City of Alta, UT
Village of Taos Ski Valley, NM
Town of Truckee, CA
Tahoe Regional Planning Authority, CA / NV
Town of Mammoth Lakes, CA
City of Ketchum, ID
City of Bend, OR
City of Leavenworth, WA

CC:

The Honorable Senator Michael Bennet
The Honorable Senator Cory Gardner
The Honorable Representative Scott Tipton
The Honorable Representative Jared Polis
The Honorable Senator Orrin Hatch

The Mountain Pact
The logo features a stylized mountain peak with a white outline and a black fill, positioned to the left of the text. The text "The Mountain Pact" is in a bold, sans-serif font, with "The" in a smaller size above "Mountain".

The Honorable Senator Mike Lee
The Honorable Representative Chris Stewart
The Honorable Representative Jason Chaffetz
The Honorable Senator Tom Udall
The Honorable Senator Martin Heinrich
The Honorable Representative Ben Luján
The Honorable Senator Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Senator Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Representative Tom McClintock
The Honorable Representative Paul Cook
The Honorable Senator Harry Reid
The Honorable Senator Dean Heller
The Honorable Representative Mark Amodei
The Honorable Senator Michael Crapo
The Honorable Senator James Risch
The Honorable Representative Michael Simpson
The Honorable Senator Ron Wyden
The Honorable Senator Jeff Merkley
The Honorable Representative Greg Walden
The Honorable Senator Patty Murray
The Honorable Senator Maria Cantwell
The Honorable Representative David Reichert