## Coalition calls on Congress to fund fire program; protect communities, restore forests

by Bend\_Weekly\_News\_Sources

(Washington, D.C.) - A coalition of governmental, community and conservation organizations said Tuesday there is an urgent need to improve state and community wildfire protection and called on Congress to support increased funding for the State Fire Assistance (SFA) program managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

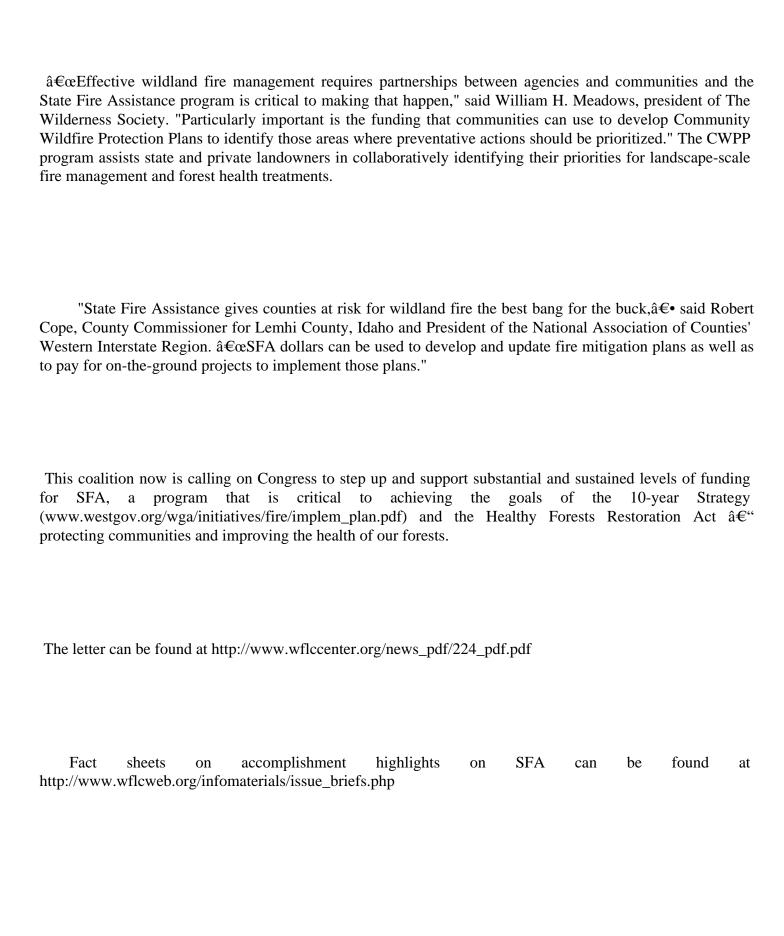
Some of the coalition members that signed a letter in support of the additional funding included the International Association of Fire Chiefs, Denver Water, the National Association of Counties, The Wilderness Society and the Western Governors' Association. A full list of signatories may be found on the letter that is linked to below.

The Administration has proposed a 14 percent reduction in SFA funding for the 2008 fiscal year. State foresters estimate that SFA funding needs to increase nearly 85 percent to \$145 million in order to meet the current and emerging community needs for wildland fire preparedness and protection.

"Washington continues to cut the Forest Service budget, even though the cost of suppressing fires is skyrocketing,― said Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano, who serves as WGA's lead for Forest Health issues. "The State Fire Assistance program is cost effective and helps prevent small wildfires from becoming dangerously large and very expensive to control.

It also provides the seed funding for state foresters to collaborate and proactively thin hazardous fuels, restore our forests and reduce the threat of wildfires.―

The SFA is the only federal program tailored to address the challenges of what is called the "wildland urban interface―. It provides cost-sharing funds to state forestry agencies to help states and communities successfully prepare for and respond to wildland fires. The funding is also used to support Community Wildfire Protection Planning (CWPP) and the reduction of hazardous fuels on lands regardless of ownership via prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. This both protects communities and ultimately enables fire to play a more natural, restorative role on the land.



Coalition calls on Congress to fund fire program; protect communities, restore forests by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources	