



**Opening Statement**  
**Hearing on the Forest Service's FY 2018 Budget Request**  
**Chairman Lisa Murkowski**  
**June 15, 2017**

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order.

We're still awaiting the arrival of Sen. Cantwell, but I understand that she will be here imminently. Recognizing that we have several votes that are set to commence around 11 o'clock, I would like to try to get things underway expeditiously.

We're here this morning for the first of three budget hearings that we will conduct between now and next Tuesday. Our topic this morning is the President's request for the U.S. Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2018. As we prepare to review that proposal, we welcome the head of the Forest Service, Chief Tom Tidwell, back to our committee. Good to have you back here, we appreciate your time.

Chief Tidwell and I have a slight sense of déjà vu going this morning, because we just did this last Wednesday, at an Appropriations subcommittee hearing I chaired to review this same budget request. Our venue has changed a little bit, but my views have not. I'll also warn you, Chief: I saved all of my *really* difficult questions for you for today. I appreciate the opportunity to continue with that line of questioning.

The President's request for the Forest Service for Fiscal Year 2018 is \$4.7 billion. That's \$880 million dollars less than last year, when we factor in the \$342 million in emergency funding that Congress provided above the 10-year average in the event of a severe fire season.

In Alaska our fire season is already well underway, so this funding is again a priority for me. While we are hoping for a better year, compared to recent years, we've already had almost 200 fires in the state, just this season. Those fires have burned more than 112,000 acres, and we have about 50 that are active as we speak..

The Forest Service's request for its wildland fire management program is roughly \$2.5 billion. Fire suppression is funded at the full 10-year average of just over \$1 billion. And while the budget does not propose a wildfire cap adjustment or any type of "fix" to end fire borrowing, I was pleased to see the administration note that it is prepared to work with Congress to find a fiscally responsible solution.

Chief Tidwell, I hope you meant that, because I plan to take you up on it, and working with you to find a solution.

I also appreciate the Forest Service's acknowledgement that its primary responsibility is to manage our national forests. When making tough funding decisions, we need to make certain we are meeting our basic forest health needs before funding other programs. I think it is a good sign that the agency's top priority in this request is to invest in national forest management.

Of course, that's not the only way this budget differs from the previous administration's proposals for the Forest Service. Rather than a wish list of spending paid for with budget gimmicks, this new request proposes real cuts to a number of programs, and I mentioned some of those in our appropriations hearing last week

Some of those cuts are worth considering. But some are concerning, like the proposed cuts to recreation programs. Some could impact critical forest management activities, like firefighting and hazardous fuels reduction. And some appear to contradict other proposals in the budget—like the steep cut to Capital Improvement and Maintenance, which will make the timber target difficult, if not impossible, to reach.

We'll look at all of those proposals carefully. But from the outset, I have a request: if you are going to worry about Forest Service budget cuts, you should also worry about the Forest Service's management failures, because those can have an even greater impact on the budgets and economies of forested communities. The Forest Service failing to do its job, whether making timber available or something else, has significant impacts on real people. We can't forget that. And all of us know that those communities would much rather be able to shape their own futures, instead of being forced to depend on unpredictable federal funding.

Ultimately, what I want is for the Forest Service to do more to make our forests the economic engines they should be. Not just in Alaska, but in the Lower 48, as well. While Alaska paints a very stark picture of the need for robust and responsible uses of our national forests, the need is nationwide.

Recreation, tourism, and forest products can and must coexist for us to have thriving and healthy communities and forests. This is not only a matter of federal funding, but also reasonable access to resources and a real understanding of local communities' needs and opportunities. We have not had enough of that in recent years, but I'm confident this new administration will head in a better direction.

With that, given that Sen. Cantwell has not yet joined the committee. Chief I invite you to begin your comments and we will have an opportunity to hear from the Ranking Member when she arrives this morning.

Sen. Cantwell I apologize, we were trying to expedite things so we can get to our votes. I have concluded my openings but would invite you to provide the same.

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