



**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY POLICY,
NATURAL RESOURCES AND
REGULATORY AFFAIRS**

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Doug Ose (CA-03), Chairman

PRESS RELEASE

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**OSE CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION
TO WILDFIRE THREAT IN THE WEST**

WASHINGTON D.C. – Congressman Doug Ose (R-Sacramento) today called for increased measures for the prevention and suppression of wildfires in the West. The House Government Reform Subcommittee on Energy Policy, Natural Resources and Regulatory Affairs, which Ose chairs, held a hearing titled “Wildfires in the West – Is the Bush Administration’s Response Adequate?”

“Although the Bush Administration is moving in the right direction, it is clear from today’s testimony that we need to do more. We have a serious problem protecting humans, the communities they live in, and the environment from the devastating effects of catastrophic wildfires,” Ose said. “We need to use the tools provided under the Healthy Forests Initiative and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to implement an aggressive and comprehensive fire prevention program and we need to do it now. Numerous studies exist that indicate the depth and breadth of the problem and it is time for decisionmakers to stop fiddling while Rome burns.”

Witnesses testified that funding from the Federal government for pre-fire mitigation and prevention efforts has been a challenge to secure on an ongoing basis.

Currently, two bureaus within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have established grant programs for wildfires prevention. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) requires a 25% State, local or in-kind contribution to match the 75% Federal share. The Forest Service program requires a 50% match to the Federal share.

At today’s hearing, Mark E. Rey, Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, USDA announced that the law or USDA’s implementing rules authorize him, on an emergency basis, to either waive, reduce or defer the State or local matching share. Currently, USDA hopes to act on an emergency basis to help San Diego County since it has been unable to meet its share. Additionally, Rey said that the law or USDA’s

implementing rules for the Forest Service program do not include waiver authority for him but promised to investigate if USDA can reduce or defer a matching share.

Additionally, Rey testified to the need of a more proactive approach to fire suppression that addresses underlying causes. “This approach recognizes fire as part of the ecosystem; focuses on hazardous fuels reduction, integrated vegetation management, and firefighting strategies that include the expanded utilization of wildland fire use, when appropriate; and allocates and utilizes resources in a cost-effective manner on a long-term basis. A community-based approach relies on local knowledge and develops objectives to manage long-term activities in communities and environments.”

Bill McCammon, President, California Fire Chiefs Association, echoed Ose’s call for the need for increase fire prevention measures. “We know how to minimize the impacts of these devastating fires. It has been shown time and time again, that in areas where there have been fuels management programs implemented, combined with effective land use planning, that the effects of fire have been minimized. Prevention has to be the cornerstone of our efforts to curtail and minimize the effects of these devastating fires.”