Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 15, 2025

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
H-310 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Grace Meng
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Rogers and Ranking Member Meng:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you provide robust funding levels on wildfire science and technology to match the scale of the wildfire crisis. A whole of government approach to wildfires requires that we build a more responsive and resilient wildland firefighting workforce and better leverage the resources and expertise at our federal science agencies to improve wildfire response capabilities and to utilize data and technology to protect communities.

As states continue to contend with the reality of increasingly large wildfires and nearly year-long fire seasons, these are issues that we have been working to address for years. In 2024, over 64,000 wildfires burned 8.9 million acres—both figures higher than their 10-year averages—and the National Interagency Coordination Center mobilized the most crews and aircraft of any year in the past decade. The country spent 59 days at National Preparedness Level 5 in 2024, the third most in any year since 1990. In Oregon, wildfires, in part caused by the combination of heat waves and lightning, burned over 1.9 million acres, the most on record. The wind-driven Smokehouse Creek Fire in February and March 2024 became the largest wildfire in Texas history. Tragically, 2025 has already started on a deadly note, as the wildfires that decimated Los Angeles County in January killed 30 people and destroyed over 18,000 structures.

The Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission noted in their 2023 report the need for increased funding for research to keep pace with the rapid change underway within the wildfire environment. We strongly encourage sustained and continued investment in the science, observation, and technology required to plan and respond to wildfires before and after ignition.

Specifically, we are requesting:

$19 million for Fire Weather Activities at NOAA. –NOAA plays an important role in providing advanced notice of wildfire risks and active wildfire-weather coupled forecasts. We request a total of $19,000,000 to fully support fire weather initiatives across NOAA, including to support the Fire Weather Testbed. We encourage NOAA to utilize its satellite and artificial intelligence assets in these efforts and to continue working with Federal, State, Tribal, and local partners and land managers to improve information dissemination related to wildfire events. This request also includes providing sufficient funding to fully support the Incident Meteorologist (IMET) workforce that provides critical on-the-ground information during wildfire response.

$11.8 million for Advanced Capabilities for Emergency Response Operations (ACERO) at NASA. – There are significant limitations on the safe use of unmanned and crewed aerial assets for situational awareness and firefighting during wildfire incidents. NASA has been making steady progress with the $9,900,000 in FY24 appropriations for the ACERO initiative to leverage NASA-developed traffic management capabilities to improve responses to wildfires and other disasters. In March 2025, NASA carried out a flight test using its new portable airspace management system (PAMS) to simulate wildfire response operations. For FY26, we request full funding of $11,800,000 for NASA to deliver a draft report for a concept of operations across government agencies on coordination of wildfire management and suppression, including documentation of design requirements and performance of the of the PAMS as well as test results of the first PAMS prototype in simulated fire conditions.

$20.4 million for the Wildland Fires project and $10 million for Space-Based Wildfire Detection Technologies in the Earth Science Division at NASA – We request $20,400,000 for NASA to continue to support the improved prediction, management, and mitigation of overall impacts of wildfires within the United States and around the world in the newly consolidated Wildland Fires element of the Responsive Science Initiative of the Earth Science Division, which includes the Wildland Fire Applications, FireSense, and FireTech projects. We support continued funding for space-based wildfire detection technologies, of $10,000,000.

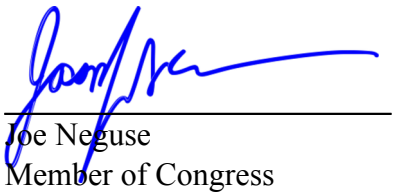
$7.56 million for Wildfires and the Wildland-Urban Interface at NIST – We request $7,560,000 for Wildfire- and the Wildland-Urban Interface-related research at NIST within funding for Climate and Energy Measurement, Tools, and Testbeds, including for the development of improved computational models for WUI fires. Developing improved WUI risk exposure metrics and tools to assess and mitigate the fire vulnerability of structures and communities is important to protecting at-risk communities.

As fire seasons become more destructive and year-round, we must continue to deploy our federal resources in line with needs on the ground. It is time for the federal government to start treating wildfires more like other major disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods by supporting more than just traditional disaster relief efforts. We ask that you provide this funding for wildfire programs and ensure that wildfire priorities be reflected in the final appropriations bills.

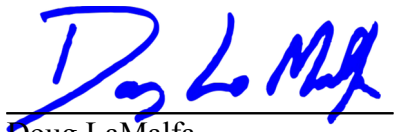
We appreciate your attention to our request. We look forward to working with you as the bills come to the floor, and on making vital investments to the health, safety, and resiliency of our communities.

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
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Jim Tokuda
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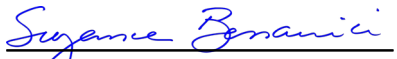

Suzanne Bonamici
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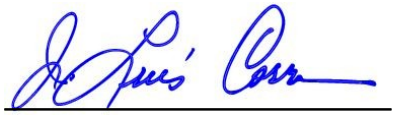

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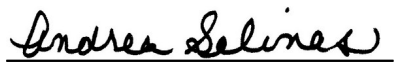

Andrea Salinas
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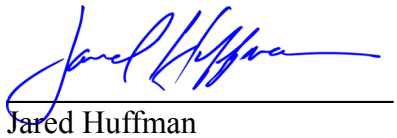

Jared Huffman
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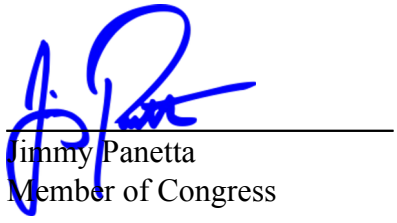

Jimmy Panetta
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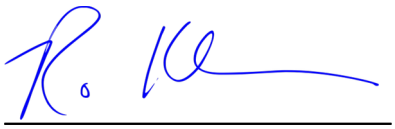

Ro Khanna
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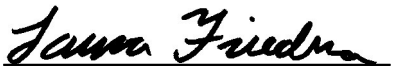

Laura Friedman
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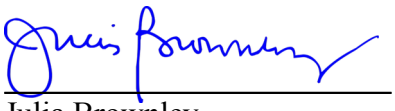

Julia Brownley
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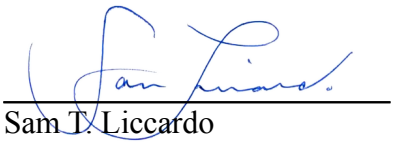

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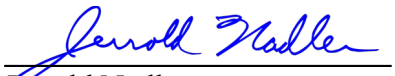

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress