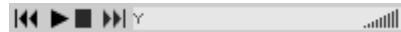




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# Funding bill to provide emergency cash to U.S. Forest Service



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10:00 PM PDT on Wednesday, October 1, 2008

By DUANE W. GANG  
The Press-Enterprise

The San Bernardino and Cleveland national forests won't have to make cuts in road maintenance and campground upkeep thanks to an emergency spending bill President Bush signed late Tuesday.

The stopgap measure includes \$500 million in emergency spending to cover unexpected U.S. Forest Service firefighting costs, \$250 million for hazardous fuels management and \$25 million to boost firefighter retention efforts.

Big fires, particularly in Northern California, ate up the U.S. Forest Service budget this year, forcing the two forests in the Inland area to make about \$6 million in cuts in services.

"We were facing devastating cuts to maintenance, services and even fire prevention in some areas," Inland Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Redlands, said in a statement announcing the new funds.

"Congress and the President have responded with this emergency funding increase to ensure that we do not create an even worse fire threat in the future."

The \$500 million, signed just before the close of the federal fiscal year on Sept. 30, eliminates the need throughout the U.S. Forest Service for cutbacks, Lewis spokesman Jim Specht said Wednesday. The House and Senate passed the bill last week.

The San Bernardino National Forest faced the prospect of cutting \$4.5 million from its \$68.7 million budget. The cut would have meant forgoing 18 miles of planned roadwork and planning for future tree- and brush-clearing efforts.

The cuts would have represented about 6.5 percent of the forest's budget.

Meanwhile, the Cleveland National Forest planned on trimming \$1.35 million, or about 4.5 percent of its \$25 million budget.

"All of that is back in the budget," Specht said. "They don't have to worry about making those cuts."

Brian Harris, a Cleveland National Forest spokesman, said officials there do not know yet exactly how much of the new funding they will receive.

But Harris said he is hopeful the money will eliminate the need for cuts. The proposed cutbacks came from their core budget for "maintaining the forest, our job as a land-steward agency."

Specht said there is no way to tell at this point how much of the \$250 million slated to pay to reduce flammable trees and brush will come to the San Bernardino and Cleveland national forests. Those decisions are made by Forest Service officials leaders in Washington and across the country.

"The \$25 million that's been set aside for firefighter retention, obviously it doesn't designate a particular area, but Southern California has the biggest problem and San Bernardino clearly has the biggest problem," Specht said.

In his statement, Lewis said there is clear evidence the San Bernardino National Forest is losing experienced firefighters because of low pay and benefits.

"These additional funds will hopefully provide the resources needed to retain these important staff members," he said.

The bill signed by Bush also includes \$22.6 billion in disaster relief for areas hit by hurricanes and fires.

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## **Forest cuts**

Here's a look at the cuts to San Bernardino and Cleveland national forest budgets that may no longer be needed after President Bush signed a bill Tuesday night giving the entire U.S. Forest Service a \$500 million financial boost.

**\$750,000** for a makeover of the Thurman Flats Picnic Area in the San Bernardino National Forest

**\$700,000** to demolish and replace 50-year-old cinderblock restrooms at five campgrounds in the Cleveland National Forest

**\$250,000** for campground paving and roadwork in the Cleveland National Forest

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