



March 5, 2025

Dear Member of Congress,

As the 119th Congress deliberates on the federal budget and addresses the increasing costs and impacts of wildfires, I am writing to inform you about a valuable resource developed by Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS): the [Federal Wildfire Spending Database](#). This database provides policymakers with a comprehensive tool to better understand how taxpayer dollars are being allocated, spent, and managed across wildfire-related programs.

Wildfires have become a growing fiscal challenge; TCS catalogued \$59.7 billion in federal appropriations for wildfire activities between FY2015 and FY2024. As Congress debates funding priorities and rising wildfire risks, this database offers critical insights into how federal funds are distributed across mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and research activities.

### **Key Features of the Federal Wildfire Spending Database**

- **Comprehensive Cataloging of Federal Appropriations:** The database tracks appropriations across multiple agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Department of the Interior (DOI), FEMA, and others. It includes wildfire-specific programs as well as broader initiatives that intersect with wildfire management, such as disaster relief and resilience programs.
- **Transparency in Spending Trends:** The database highlights how more than half of wildfire-specific appropriations have been directed toward response activities—primarily suppression—while mitigation efforts have received only 17% of funding.
- **Identification of Gaps in Data and Oversight:** Many programs lack publicly available or detailed appropriations data, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness. The database emphasizes the need for improved transparency through the creation of a wildfire budget crosscut, which would provide granular data by activity type, geography, and agency.
- **Insights and Recommendations:** Drawing on our 30 years of experience analyzing federal spending, TCS offers recommendations to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently and effectively. For example, hazardous fuel reduction programs intended to mitigate wildfire risks must be evaluated against outcome-oriented metrics to avoid unintended consequences that could increase fire risks.

### **Why This Matters in FY2025 Budget Debate**

The federal government's approach to wildfire funding is fragmented across discretionary appropriations, mandatory programs, and supplemental appropriations. While mechanisms like the "wildfire funding fix" exempt certain suppression funds from statutory spending limits, Congress must

also address broader questions about how to allocate limited resources effectively within these constraints.

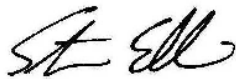
The Federal Wildfire Spending Database can serve as a critical tool for identifying opportunities to:

- Prioritize investments in cost-effective mitigation strategies that reduce future suppression costs;
- Improve transparency in how wildfire-related funds are spent; and
- Evaluate whether existing programs achieve their stated goals or create perverse incentives that undermine forest health and resilience.

As you consider FY2025 appropriations and supplemental funding for recent wildfire disasters, we encourage you to utilize this database as a resource to inform your decisions. By leveraging this tool, Congress can better ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent strategically to protect communities, reduce risks, and address the growing challenges posed by wildfires.

We would be happy to provide additional information or arrange a briefing on how this database can support your legislative priorities. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue affecting taxpayers and communities nationwide. We look forward to working with you to promote transparency and accountability in federal wildfire spending.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Ellis". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Steve Ellis  
President  
Taxpayers for Common Sense