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From: POLITICO Pro
Sent: Wed 10/18/2017 10:59:28 PM
Subject: Senators push McConnell, Schumer on need for 'fire-borrowing' fix

By Jenny Hopkinson

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As fire officials in California today reported progress in containing the blazes that have ravaged wine country, a bipartisan group of senators looked to leadership to solve the "fire-borrowing" problem when the upper chamber takes up a disaster-relief package in coming weeks.

Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) joined with eight other senators in a letter to Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, arguing that the next emergency spending package should include the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, S. 1842 (115) — a measure that would ensure the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Interior have "stable, reliable" resources to fight future fires.

The disaster-relief package the House passed last week included \$577 million to cover 2017 wildfires but did not include a fire-funding fix.

The Forest Service and Interior have spent nearly \$2.9 billion in fighting wildfires this year, far exceeding their allotted budgets. When the Forest Service exceeds its wildfire-suppression budget, it must siphon money from other programs, jeopardizing the effectiveness of efforts such as fire prevention. S. 1842 would fund fire suppression like responses to other natural disasters, letting the departments seek funding from Congress, instead of forcing them to borrow from other lines in their budget.

"Passage of the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act will free up funds to do the prevention work that reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfires that our country has suffered this year — funding that could have prevented the deaths of Americans, destruction of hundreds of homes and businesses, the loss of business revenue due to evacuations, and the loss of millions of acres of forests," they wrote.

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