

More money to fight forest fires likely this year

BY WILLIAM YARDLEY
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Late last summer, with wildfires burning throughout the West and the U.S. Forest Service announcing yet again that it would have to borrow money to fight them, lawmakers from the region vowed that this would be the year Congress fixed the funding problem and found ways to make forests more resilient against fire.

Sure enough, there it was early this week — a proposed solution attached to the omnibus budget bill lawmakers now appear poised to pass. The measure was backed by the White House, several Western senators of both parties, timber industry leaders and some conservation groups.

But by Wednesday morning, after congressional leaders announced a final version of the budget bill, the provisions changing how firefighting is funded and forests are protected were gone.

In their place: a massive \$600 million increase in the fire suppression budget, which is about 50 percent more than was budgeted this year.

In budget vernacular, that kind of increase is called a “plus up” — and a big one. Yet Robert Bonnie, who oversees the Forest Service in his role as an under-secretary of agriculture, called it “a Band-Aid.”

“The money’s helpful,” Bonnie said of the added suppression funds, in an interview Wednesday, “but we very much need a long-term fix.”

In the last two decades, the Forest Service has seen its firefighting allocation creep steadily higher, from just over 15 percent of its total budget in the 1990s to more than half of it now.

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This year, the Forest Service spent more than \$1.7 billion fighting fires, a record. (The extra \$600 million for next year would bring the budgeted amount to just below this year’s spending level.)

But while Bonnie was among those who supported the language in the budget bill earlier this week, the provisions were unacceptable to two powerful senators who helped make sure it was removed: Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Maria Cantwell of Washington.

Murkowski, a Republican, is the chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Cantwell, a Democrat, is the committee’s ranking minority member.

“The proposal that surfaced during the budget negotiations was not the right way to go,” Murkowski said. “It was not developed in the open and transparent manner that we would hope. It was not fully vetted.”

Both senators saw their states devastated by wildfire this year and have long said they want to remake the way firefighting is funded and forests are managed. Both have proposed legislation of their own in the past. And late Wednesday, each went out of her way to praise the leadership of the other on the issue during speeches on the Senate floor. They promised to pursue legislation early in 2016.

That does not mean the senators expect to agree on everything.

The language initially included in the budget bill would have made several sig-



COURTESY OF MAINE FOREST SERVICE RANGER MIKE DAIGLE

A Maine Forest Service helicopter makes another round with a water bucket in tow to extinguish a Memorial Day fire in a field adjacent to a wooded area in Caribou this year.

nificant changes. It would have set up a process by which the Forest Service could request federal disaster money typically spent on things like hurricanes. In the name of forest preservation, it also included provisions that would have eased environmental restrictions on logging and thinning of forests.

While thinning can help counter decades of fire suppression that has allowed forests to become dangerously and unnaturally dense, where to draw the line between thinning and more expansive logging has been a constant fight.

“Adding such problematic language to the legislation will only create controversy and bog down progress on an issue that is otherwise well supported,” environmental groups including Earthjustice and the Natu-

ral Resources Defense Council wrote to congressional leaders Friday.

Evidence of the debate was clear even amid the goodwill on the Senate floor.

While Murkowski questioned the proposed funding mechanism, she also suggested that the bill did not go far enough toward easing logging in her state. She called the budget bill language “a good start” but also “a missed opportunity.”

In Alaska, she said, people are “at physical risk from fire and at an economic risk from restrictions on timber harvesting.”

Those were among the reasons Murkowski, who is also on the Appropriations Committee, helped push through the \$600 million increase this year.

“It provides real money now, and it gives us the time

to develop longer-term real solutions,” she said.

Heaping more praise on Cantwell, Murkowski then gave her the floor, prompting Cantwell to heap praise right back at her, particularly for the funding increase this year.

But Cantwell offered a somewhat different wish list of needs, including money for new air tankers, communications equipment and mapping. And while she said “massive fuel reduction does need to take place,” she also expressed reservations about easing logging restrictions.

“We’re not going to get at this overall solution by simply clear-cutting large swaths of land,” Cantwell said.

And with that, the senators yielded the floor and the debate continued, apparently into next year.



REUTERS | US FOREST SERVICE HANDOUT

Firefighters prepare to battle the Wolverine wildfire near Chelan, Washington, in August. Wildfires destroyed 50 homes in north central Idaho while a fire in north-central Washington nearly doubled in size, almost encircling the town of Chelan and forcing the evacuations.

Theme parks look to calm jitters

Popular resorts install metal detectors to enhance security

BY SANDRA PEDICINI
ORLANDO SENTINEL

ORLANDO, Florida — In a sign of how jittery the nation has become about terrorism and gun violence, major theme parks on Thursday installed metal detectors at the front of their attractions.

In Orlando, Walt Disney World would not say how long its metal detectors would be in place. SeaWorld said it had installed the devices as part of enhanced security for the holidays. Universal Orlando said it was testing using them as guests approach the theme parks.

The changes extend outside Orlando. Disneyland and Universal Studios in Hollywood are also in-

“We want our guests to feel safe when they come here. This test is a natural progression for us.”

TOM SCHRODER, UNIVERSAL

stalling the detectors.

Security in general has been a big concern following recent attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California. On Wednesday, the federal Department of Homeland Security issued a bulletin saying it was “especially concerned that terrorist-inspired individuals and homegrown violent extremists may be encouraged or inspired to target public events or places.” It said the public should expect to see more police and more stringent security at public places and events.

Disney World — where a man was arrested last week

end after trying to enter the Magic Kingdom with a gun — is now discontinuing the sale of toy guns. It is also banning people 14 and older from wearing costumes — even at Halloween parties. More deputies and security guards have been visible at the resort lately, and specially trained dogs have been patrolling key areas. The movie theater at Disney Springs where tonight’s high profile premiere of the new “Star Wars” movie takes place will also have at least one metal detector.

“We continually review our comprehensive approach to security and are

implementing additional security measures, as appropriate,” Disney said in a statement.

Universal spokesman Tom Schroder said the decision to test metal detectors was not driven by a specific threat. He said in an email: “We want our guests to feel safe when they come here. We’ve long used metal detection for special events, such as Halloween Horror Nights. This test is a natural progression for us as we study best practices for security in today’s world.”

SeaWorld said in an email it would be “enhancing security measures for the busy holiday season, including increased security presence both inside and outside the parks.”

On social media, many



RICK LOOMIS | LOS ANGELES TIMES

Metal detectors are installed at Disneyland in Anaheim, California, on Thursday.

theme park fans welcomed the changes and called them long overdue.

Metal detectors have become more common for general security reasons. Travelers have walked through them at airports for years. Fans attending NBA games go through them. Major League Baseball has begun requiring them for its teams’ games.

Six Flags theme parks

put up metal detectors, most of them after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, at the main gates. In 2004, Disney World experimented with metal detectors at its entrance but did not make them permanent.

Earlier this year, Universal put up metal detectors in front of some rides to make sure that people don’t bring on items such as cell phones.

Trudeau leaves room for local pipeline approval

Need for community input cited

BY JULIE GORDON
REUTERS

VANCOUVER — Canada’s government sounded another note of opposition to a proposed oil pipeline in the country’s west coast, though he appeared to leave the door open to allowing proponents to acquire the needed local approval for projects to go ahead.

The newly elected Liberal government campaigned on a promise to toughen up the environmental review process for oil pipelines and has voiced its opposition to Enbridge Inc.’s Northern Gateway pipeline.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reiterated that stance on Thursday, telling reporters, “I’ve been saying for years that the Great Bear Rainforest is no place for an oil pipeline, (and) that continues to be my position.”

Oil would travel through parts of the Great Bear Rainforest as part of the planned pipeline from Alberta to British Columbia.



Trudeau

Trudeau told reporters.

“However, we do need to continue to allow processes ... underway where proponents of a broad range of projects can attempt to acquire the social license that simply was not available, even as a theoretical option, over the past years,” he added.

Canada’s energy minister said in an interview earlier this month that Canada will give aboriginal groups more say in discussions over natural resource projects located on their territory, which should help pave the way for major pipelines and mines.

Tips for better indoor air quality in winter

BY ALAN J. HEAVENS
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

I just replaced the furnace filter — every six months, as directed by the professional who visits to fine-tune it periodically.

Looking at the accumulated dirt made me glad it was the filter, not my lungs, that looked so sooty, but it made me wonder about indoor air quality.

We have central air-conditioning, so our windows stay closed in the summer. When I do open the windows in the spring and mid-fall, there is a lot of sneezing because of pollen and leaf mold.

Winter is when much of the world locks down, however, and the experts tell me that indoor air quality can suffer as a result.

Space heaters, ranges, ovens, furnaces, fireplaces, water heaters and building materials in the home can seriously affect air quality, as can dust mites, pet dander and smoking.

Keeping fumes, dander, mites and other pollutants and allergens to a minimum helps prevent respiratory problems and allergic reactions, including



BDN FILE

Heating oil soot, pet dander and dust mites all contribute to bad air quality inside winter-tight homes.

coughing, headaches, itchy and watery eyes, shortness of breath, even asthma attacks.

Here are three suggestions from air-filter manufacturer Permatron Corp., based in Elk Village, Illinois:

Clean it up. While most people ascribe to spring cleaning, getting your home ready for winter is equally important. Use a damp cloth to dust tops of doors, window frames, cabinets, artwork and ceil-

ing fans. Dust and vacuum air vents, under furniture and behind the refrigerator.

Don’t track outside dirt, sidewalk and road chemicals, and other pollutants into your home. Simply add grass or rubber mats outside, so people can wipe their feet before entering. Ask your family as well as guests to remove their shoes and store them on a rubber mat next to the front door to keep from

tracking dirt and pollutants throughout the house.

Keep mites away. Combat them by keeping the humidity about 35 percent; drier air discourages mites. Clean drapes and bedding frequently in hot water.

Turn your recirculating fan to “on” instead of “auto.” The “auto” setting causes the fan to shut off with the rest of the system as soon as the desired temperature is reached.