

Obama proposes shift in wildfire funding

By Coral Davenport, New York Times

WASHINGTON – President Obama’s annual budget request to Congress will propose a significant change in how the government pays to fight wildfires, administration officials said, a move that they say reflects the ways in which climate change is increasing the risk for and cost of those fires.

The wildfire funding shift is one in a series of recent White House actions related to climate change as Obama tries to highlight the issue and build political support for his administration’s more muscular policies, like curbing carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants. On Monday, Mr. Obama plans to describe his proposal at a meeting in Washington with governors of Western states that have been ravaged recently by severe drought and wildfires.

The proposal will ask Congress to pay the costs of fighting extreme wildfires in the same way it finances the federal response to disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes, the officials said. When unpredictable events like Hurricane Sandy are destructive enough to be declared disasters by the president, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is authorized to exceed its annual budget and draw on a special disaster account. The account is adjusted each year to reflect the 10-year average cost of responding to such events.

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