

Governors' group calls to end 'wildfire borrowing'



Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, who chairs the Western Governors' Association, spoke Aug. 19 in Tahoe about drought and fire. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Jesse Paul, Denver Post

The Western Governors' Association in a letter last week urged U.S. Senate and congressional leadership, and President Obama, to increase federal wildfire budgets so agencies can stop using fire prevention funds for fire suppression.

The association said the U.S. Forest Service is again on pace to utilize prevention funds for suppression – known as “fire borrowing” – in a season where Oregon, California and Washington have seen millions of acres of forestland burn.

“We end up robbing from the land managers,” said Kevin Klein, director of the Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. “We end up stealing from those [prevention] programs to fight the fire. Treating wildfires like we do with our other programs makes sense to me.”

“In the past decade, wildfires have increased in size and intensity and the fire season now extends 60-80 days longer than historic averages,” said the association, calling its position “long-standing.” “Ineffective management, droughts and insect infestations also have left Western forest far more susceptible to catastrophic fires.”

Despite the risk, federal wildfire budgets have remained stagnant, the association said, “reinforcing this damaging wildfire cycle.”

Read the whole story