

White House calls for increase in firefighting funds

By Kurtis Alexander, San Francisco Chronicle

Devastating wildfires like the giant that is still chewing through Big Sur are driving the nation's firefighting costs to unprecedented levels, prompting the Obama administration to say the government is ill-equipped to handle the increasingly busy fire seasons of the historically dry West.

White House Budget Director Shaun Donovan on Tuesday called on Congress to better fund the U.S. Forest Service, the country's biggest wildland firefighting force, which in six of the past 10 years has exhausted its allocation for fire suppression.

The agency has dipped into other programs to make up the shortfall – including programs that aim to prevent wildfires in the first place.

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