

Fiery rhetoric from Calif. to feds over fire debt

By Associated Press

California's emergency services director fired off a sharply worded letter to the U.S. Forest Service this week that said the agency had stiffed local governments \$18 million for fighting wildfires on federal lands last year and raised the prospect the state may stop protecting national forests during blazes.

"I cannot continue to support the deployment of resources to protect federal land that ultimately may bankrupt our local governments," Emergency Services Director Mark Ghilarducci said in the letter sent Monday to Forest Service Chief Thomas Tidwell.

The dispute stems from longstanding commitments that coordinate and reimburse firefighters for work on federal lands. Nearly half the land in California is federally owned, and the greatest percentage of that is in National Forests.

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