

Calif. wildfire risk is rising; Congress not helping

By Emily Cadei, Sacramento Bee

Washington Forestry experts have a dire warning for California: the conditions are ripe for more catastrophic fire seasons like the one last fall. And an arcane federal funding arrangement is making it a lot harder for forestry officials to do something about it.

Instead of fixing the problem, however, Congress just punted – again.

Senate leaders announced a two-year budget deal Wednesday afternoon that would lift the federal spending caps instituted under the 2011 Budget Control Act, aka “sequestration.” It is expected to pass in the Senate this week, but could face a fight in the House. Still, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called it a “breakthrough” after months of brinkmanship. It “doesn’t have everything Democrats want, it doesn’t have everything the Republicans want, but it has a great deal of what the American people want,” Schumer said.

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