

NOTE: S. 1910, approved August 8, was assigned Public Law No. 106-258.

**Memorandum on Impacts of
Wildland Fires to Rural
Communities**

August 8, 2000

*Memorandum for the Secretary of Interior,
the Secretary of Agriculture*

*Subject: Impacts of Wildland Fires to Rural
Communities*

We are a little over halfway through the 2000 fire season and all indications are that it will be the worst season in 50 years. As of August 7, 2000, 63,623 wildland fires have so far this year burned more than 4 million acres at a cost of \$500 million in firefighting expenses. There are up to 300 new fires every day, and Federal, State, and local agencies are managing 50 fires over 1,000 acres in size. The current weather conditions following the prolonged drought in much of the west are drying out millions of acres of forest and rangeland, and the National Weather Service's near-term forecast calls for continued hot, dry conditions with the probability of additional lightning-caused fires.

Over the last several years, the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior have increased their efforts to protect communities, watersheds, and threatened species from the risk of fire, including reducing hazardous fuels on at-risk public and private lands.

In the western National Forests alone, there are more than 56 million acres at risk. Since 1994 when the Forest Service treated approximately 385,000 acres across the United States, the Department of Agriculture has increased annual hazardous fuels treatments almost four-fold. Last year, almost 2 million acres were treated. But there is much more to be done. You are currently working to develop a long-term strategy to expand Federal efforts to protect communities in the urban-wildland interface and the underlying ecology of these areas. This long-term plan will set targeted funding priorities to reduce fire risk in fire-dependent ecosystems throughout the country. The plan will focus on protecting communities, water-

sheds, and species and is a critical component of any fire management program.

To help address this issue in the near term, today I am directing you to report back to me in 30 days with recommendations on actions that may be taken to respond to this year's fires; to reduce the impacts of these wildland fires on rural communities; and to ensure sufficient firefighting resources in the future. First, the report should consider potential responses to this year's fires, including:

- A short-term plan for rehabilitation of fire-damaged ecosystems, including means to minimize the introduction of invasive species, reduce threats to water quality, and protect endangered species. The plan should also address the role of natural restoration processes in these efforts.
- An assessment of the economic impacts in affected areas.

Second, the report should focus on the short-term actions that Federal agencies, in cooperation with States and local communities, can take to reduce immediate hazards to other communities in the wildland-urban interface. As part of this effort, the report will examine how the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and tribal governments, and local communities, will prepare for anticipated extreme fire conditions in the future, by analyzing fire management planning and firefighter personnel and resources.

You should use this information to review firefighting and prevention needs and work with the Office of Management and Budget to determine whether there are additional FY 2001 funding needs so that the Administration may request, and the Congress may provide, additional resources before the end of the fiscal year.

William J. Clinton

**Remarks on Presenting the
Presidential Medal of Freedom**

August 9, 2000

The President. Thank you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the White House. I want to join Hillary in welcoming all those who have been acknowledged and all the other