



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JAN 1 1 2011

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Madam Chairman:

This letter serves to transmit the 2009 Large Fire Cost Review conducted by an independent panel, as required in House Report 111-316. I am transmitting the report for the Department of Agriculture and on behalf of the Department of the Interior.

The primary purpose of the review was to determine whether agency personnel made prudent and cost effective incident management decisions in light of risk management considerations. The panel found that in every case, agency administrators, their staffs, and incident personnel paid attention to balancing safety, cost, and risk management and that expenditures were prudent.

In compliance with House Report 111-316, this report will be posted to the Forest Service Web site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/publications/index.html>.

A similar letter and copy of the report are being sent to Senator Lamar Alexander and Congressmen James P. Moran and Michael K. Simpson.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary

Enclosure



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JAN 11 2011

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Alexander:

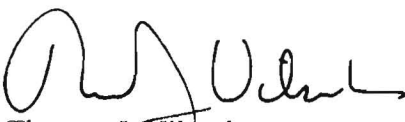
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Thomas J. Vilsack
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JAN 11 2011

The Honorable James P. Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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JAN 11 2011

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Simpson:

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USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management



Date: October 26, 2010

2009 Independent Panel Large Fire Cost Review Errata Sheet

The 2009 Large Fire Cost Review was conducted by an independent panel convened by the contractor, The Guidance Group, Inc., on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior, as directed by Congress in House Report 111-316. Neither the Forest Service nor the Department of the Interior edited or changed the report in any way. This errata pertains only to the specific items below that have been identified by the Forest Service to be in error:

Executive Summary

Page iii, Constraints on Vegetation Management. On the Angeles National Forest, prescribed burning projects are limited to less than 100 acres because of air quality regulations.

Correction. Prescribed fire projects on the Angeles National Forest are limited to 100 acres per day because of air quality regulations.

Chapter II. FY 2009 Large Cost Fires

La Brea Fire

Page 20, Item 6 Direct Protection Area Boundary: The desire of Santa Barbara County to keep the fire confined to the national forest and off the state responsibility area (SRA), for which the county contracts, caused resistance to suppression strategies that would have allowed the fire to spread across that boundary to a point where firefighters could engage the fire more easily.

Correction. It was the desire of Santa Barbara County and CAL FIRE to keep the fire confined to the national forest and off the state responsibility.

Station Fire

Page 24, Item 1 Protection of Structures and Built Infrastructure: The Incident Management Team estimated the value at risk as \$1B. Type I structure engines and airtankers used to protect the structures contributed significantly to costs.

Correction. At least 60 Type I structure engines were ordered by local government under the state's Master Mutual Aid agreement. Under the terms of this agreement, these resources come at no cost to the incident and support local governments' structure protection responsibilities. The Forest Service does not bear any of these costs.

Page 24, Item 2 Firefighter and Public Safety: Steep, rugged terrain and limited road access, combined with urban traffic congestion surrounding the forest, required actions to provide for firefighter safety, and contributed to the station fire's high cost.

Correction. The cost of law enforcement personnel used to support the incident with evacuations and other activities is not borne by the Forest Service but by the effected jurisdictions.

Page 25, Item 6 Ordering Federal Resources: In early 2009, the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region issued a guidance letter interpreted in the field to mean that the forests should order Forest Service personnel and equipment before

ordering state or local resources. The regional forester intended this guidance to reduce fire suppression costs. However, the decision on the station fire to initially order only Federal personnel delayed arrival of critical resources. For example, the nearby Morris fire released a strike team of CAL FIRE engines who returned to San Diego while an order for a Federal strike team of engines for the Station fire remained unfilled.

Correction. The intent of the regional forester's letter referenced was to provide budget guidance for the region's fire preparedness funds not suppression costs. In reference to the strike team of CAL FIRE engines from San Diego on the Morris fire, there were two (2) of these strike teams on the Morris fire released on August 29th, three (3) days after the start of the station fire, not during initial attack. One strike team was reassigned to the San Bernardino Unit (BDU) and the other returned to San Diego Unit (MVU).

Page 26, Item 4 *Bulldozers* – The Angeles' wilderness legislation codifies bulldozer use in designated wilderness areas. The Forest Supervisor preapproved the use of dozers for wildfire suppression on the Forest, which enabled their speedy use on this fire.

Correction. The Angeles' wilderness legislation does not codify bulldozer use in the designed wilderness area and the forest supervisor does not have authority to pre-approve the use of dozers for wildfire suppression. The wilderness legislation does authorize the Forest Service to utilize measures necessary to control wildfire in wilderness areas consistent with maintaining wilderness character while at the same time protecting public health and safety and protecting private property located immediately adjacent to wilderness areas. The regional forester has authority to approve the use of dozers in the wilderness at the request of the forest supervisor. Approval was given for both the Magic Mountain and Pleasant View Ridge Wilderness during the station fire.

Chapter III. Cost Analysis

Page 54, *Cost Sharing*: During an incident, a cost sharing team determines how participating agencies will ultimately share the costs of fighting the fire.

Correction. A cost sharing team does not determine how participating agencies will ultimately share the costs of fighting the fire. Agency administrators have this authority and make these decisions. The cost share team facilitates the completion of a cost share agreement to reflect the Agency administrators' decisions.