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Please provide an update with specifics on how the wildfire prevention and suppression funds from the IIJA have been allocated and dispersed to the field thus far, including how the funding amounts to each region were determined.

Response: The *Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America's Forests* (10-year Strategy) combines a historic investment of congressional funding with years of scientific research and planning into a national effort that will dramatically increase the scale of forest health treatments over the next decade. This work focuses on identified key "firesheds," which are large, forested landscapes, about 250,000 acres in size, with a high likelihood that an ignition could place homes, communities, infrastructure, municipal watersheds, critical habitats, recreational areas, and other values at risk. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service focused most of the hazardous fuels, prescribed fire, and all the fuelbreak Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding into critical areas identified by the 10-year Strategy, https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Wildfire-Crisis-Implementation-Plan.pdf.

The BIL funding allocation allows the Agency to treat these areas at a scale to protect structures and critical watersheds from uncharacteristic wildfires. In addition, State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance funding has been sent to the Forest Service Regions that are in the process of awarding grants to the States. The funding allocation to each State was done using the same formulation agreed to with the National Association of State Foresters for regular annual funding for those programs.

In April, the Forest Service announced 10 initial landscapes to receive $130 million in BIL investment to begin implementation of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy in fiscal year 2022, including the Central Oregon Landscape. The areas around Bend, Oregon, and within the Deschutes National Forest were identified for investment and selected to be fully funded, as were each of the 10 initial landscapes. In fiscal year (FY) 2022, the Central Oregon landscape received over $4.22 million in BIL funding to treat an additional 7,000 acres. This landscape also received Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project funding and Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership funding to treat approximately 10,000 acres. The Central Oregon landscape, along with the other selected landscapes, will provide a detailed "Action Plan" to explain how they will be treating land across the firesheds. The Pacific Northwest Region estimates a backlog of 350,000 acres in need of treatment in this area. The table below details BIL FY 2022 investments in critical areas defined by the Fire Registry:

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Landscape Name	Region	FY 22 Funding level. BIL.
Kootenai Complex	**1**	**$3,600,000**
Colorado Front Range	**2**	**$18,109,330**
Enchanted Circle	**3**	**$6,695,000**
Prescott	**3**	**$11,149,000**
4FRI	**3**	**$12,071,000**
Southwest Idaho	**4**	**$17,446,000**
North Yuba	**5**	**$6,800,000**
Stanislaus	**5**	**$21,851,000**
Central Washington Initiative	**6**	**$26,400,000**
Central Oregon	**6**	**$7,525,000**
Total Allocated		**$131,646,330**

How many acres in Oregon will be treated using funds authorized by IIJA? Following this and related investments, how many acres will need to be treated to address the hazardous fuels backlog on the landscape?

Response: An estimated 3.9 million acres of National Forest System lands in Oregon need treatment. From FY 2022 – 2024, a $41.3 million investment of BIL funds will be made in the Central Oregon's landscape to treat over 50,000 acres, including a $4.5 million investment in FY 2022 to treat 7,000 acres. The Pacific Northwest Region estimates a backlog of 350,000 acres in need of treatment in this area. This landscape also received Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project funding and Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership funding to treat approximately 10,000 acres. The Forest Service Regions will provide detailed Action Plans for selected landscapes, including the Central Oregon landscape, to explain how treatments will be accomplished across the firesheds. The Deschutes National Forest, within Central Oregon's landscape, currently has nearly 33,000 acres that cleared the National Environmental Policy Act process and available for fuels treatment activities.

Future BIL funding investments will focus on two important elements including a focus on areas of highest wildfire risk and work to maintain investments in areas of lower risk, so those acres do not revert to high risk. Community Wildfire Defense Grant funds may also be used to treat acres of state and private lands in Oregon for projects described in Community Wildfire Protection Plans. While the numbers of acres to be treated under these grants is yet unknown, the Notice of Funding Opportunity is expected to be released later during the summer of 2022, with funds distributed to communities in the fall of 2022. In addition, the region is increasing partnerships with State and Tribal agencies for personnel support. This includes BIL funding for crews using Tribal Forest Protection Act authorities, as well as building on pilot projects with the Oregon Department of Forestry in eastern Oregon to create thinning crews under shared stewardship agreements.

Community Wildfire Defense Grant program base funding has also been sent to Regions for disbursement to States in accordance with their stated desire to participate in managing the grant program and their consequent need for capacity building. The base funding is allocated to provide outreach and capacity support to implement the program. Oregon Department of Forestry has been allocated $50,000 of the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program base funding. This amount was determined based upon Oregon's requested level of assistance. The Forest Service is on track to announce a Notice of Funding Opportunity in https://www.grants.gov/ later during the summer of 2022, with funds distributed to communities in the fall of 2022.

How do your departments plan on achieving these strategies when there are 20% vacancy rates for permanent wildland fire positions in Oregon? What plans are in place to fill these positions? What areas of Oregon have been identified as "difficult to recruit" and have any of your agencies used IIJA hiring incentives? If not, will you use those incentives this summer?

Response: The Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Region (Region) historically operates at about a ten percent vacancy rate. Some reasons for the higher vacancy rate in 2022 are a tight labor market, additional positions added that target ground-based firefighting resource modernization efforts, and capacity building to implement the BIL requirements and the 10-year Strategy.

The Region has 1,900 on-board permanent on-the-ground firefighters (GS9 and below) as of pay period 13 (June 19 – July 1, 2022), which is +62 over FY 2022 planned hiring of 1,838 GS-9 and below firefighters. This reflects a shift towards a permanent workforce to support the longer duration of fire activity experienced in Oregon and across the country. When considering both permanent and temporary firefighters, the Region's pay period 13 total of 1,900 is slightly lower than the same pay period in 2021 (1,990).

End of June to mid-July generally marks the staffing peak for firefighters. At that time in 2021, there were 1,990 Forest Service firefighters on board, which marked the highest total of Forest Service firefighters on board in the Region since 2018. In preparation for the 2022 fire activity and implementation of the 10-year Strategy, the Region's emphasis remains focused on recruitment efforts for temporary and permanent firefighters in Oregon. The Region's Permanent Fire Hire Coordinator is creatively pursuing recruitment opportunities in tandem with agencies and partners to maximize joint hiring and recruitment efforts. Regions are also utilizing the recently released Emergency Wildland Firefighter Hiring Authority that allows the Agency to hire temporary employees quickly, which allows an individual to be hired and on-boarded in three to four weeks for a maximum of 60 days employment. Additionally, Regions continue to use the Forest Service's Wildland Fire Apprentice Program, https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-

with-us/jobs/fire-apprentice, which actively invests in developing future fire managers. The Region recently hired 60 apprentices.

How do you plan on retaining and reforming your workforce structure in light of the ever-increasing length of wildfire season – coupled with the increased goals of fuel treatment acres?

Response: The Forest Service is preparing a strategic staffing plan to meet the expectations of the BIL. With major investments in ecosystem restoration, now is the time to add both short and long-term capacity for delivering outcomes associated with these efforts, which requires staffing support from a variety of occupations.

The Forest Service's highest priority is protecting the health, safety, and well-being of the fire management community and the public we serve. This prioritization includes ensuring fire staff receive rest and the physical and mental health support they need to protect homes and communities, whether engaged in fuels treatments or responding to active fires.

To support work-life balance and mental health, the Forest Service implemented a national, permanent change to a three-day rest and recovery period between fire assignments, increasing the longstanding two-day standard. In addition, the Agency is focused on connecting the wildland firefighting workforce with new and existing tools around mental health including the *Preparedness Guide for Firefighters and Their Families* (https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/preparedness_guide_for_firefighters_and_their_families.pdf), the *Reset: Firefighter and Family Members' Reintegration Guide*, (https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/Reset%20Guide_web.pdf), the Stress First Aid program (https://www.fs.usda.gov/employee-services/stress-first-aid), and the Employee Assistance Program's recently developed mobile application. Additionally, the week of June 14, 2022, Forest Service Chief's office personnel hosted an all-employee Wellbeing Week that included three three-hour virtual sessions on a wide variety of personal and professional well-being topics including resources available to all employees.

In Oregon, acknowledging the year-round nature and interplay of critical work needed to support fuels reduction and respond to active fires, leadership's intent is focused on finding creative and balanced ways for employees to complete their work rather than asking them to do more. The Forest Service fully embraces and encourages employees to take advantage of employee assistance programs and other initiatives to support their well-being.

To ensure the completion of critical work, the Region also enabled fire staff to easily move between positions on a short-term, temporary basis and extend their skills across the organization as needed. Using mentorship programs also ensures new employees are successful and able to benefit from the skills, knowledge, and experience of seasoned staff with expertise in fire and

fuels management. Fire managers are also working within policy to maximize workplace flexibilities to support work-life balance to retain those employees with the skills, knowledge, and experience to provide quality fire leadership.

The Region's organizational charts are also changing to focus on the goal of maintaining operational capacity throughout the fire year as opposed to the fire season, which includes the addition of permanent firefighter positions at all levels. The change supports ongoing efforts to transition from a primarily seasonal workforce to a more permanent workforce that can meet the mission at hand.

What is the status of the distinct 'Wildland Firefighter' occupational series? When can we expect that to be rolled out so these brave people can be recognized and compensated for putting their lives on the line every summer- instead of being labeled as a Forestry Technician?

Response: On June 21, 2022, the President announced a newly distinct and defined Wildland Firefighter Occupational Series that for the first time will provide a clear path to career advancement and reflects the true nature of the work. The President also announced the implementation of BIL provisions to increase pay for federal wildland firefighters. All wildland firefighters (over 12,000 permanent and temporary Forest Service employees who meet Federal firefighter retirement eligibility) will receive the supplemental pay increase. This will put back pay (from October 1, 2021) into wildland firefighter pockets and increase their bi-weekly pay thereafter by amounts up to a total of $20,000 of 50% of base salary, plus locality pay, whichever is less. All firefighters on the roles prior to May 21, 2022, will see a pay increase as early as the end of June, with the remainder of firefighter pay increases starting in early July through August 2022. This is a supplemental pay solution. The Agency will continue to work with the Department to achieve a permanent pay solution.

Agencies will implement the new series in the coming months. Current Federal firefighters will be able to choose whether to opt-in to the new Wildland Fire Management series or stay in their current occupational series. New recruits will go into positions in the new series.

What additional steps have your departments and agencies taken to prevent another season where interagency requests for wildland firefighting crews and engines go unfilled due to insufficient personnel?

Response: Through collective learning from recent significant fire years, the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group is better poised this year to prioritize available resources for communities when and where they are needed most. They are also using a strategic regional approach to prioritize resources as opposed to only strategizing at local units. The overall goal of this approach is to commit firefighting resources to operations with a high probability of success and to operative effectively without exposure to unnecessary risk. The Region is also working

with Oregon's National Guard units to continue bolstering their capacity for wildfire response by providing wildland fire training. Where possible, the Region is increasing use of administratively determined personnel (e.g., retired Agency employees), who support incident management teams and other firefighting functions throughout the Nation.

How have your departments and agencies coordinated with local fire Departments in Oregon in preparation for the 2022 fire season?

Response: The Forest Service and other agencies heavily rely on local fire departments' coordination and support to meet the needs of interagency incident response. The Agency values the partnership with the state of Oregon, as well as local fire departments, to provide coordinated responses and has a Master Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement in place with the Oregon Department of Forestry for incident response. This agreement is valid through December 2023 and efforts will begin this fall to negotiate the next five-year agreement and ensure continuity of services.

The Forest Service has nearly 35 local cooperative agreements in place with local Oregon fire departments to provide initial and extended attack firefighting capabilities. The Region will continue to establish agreements with additional local fire departments with an interest in coordinated interagency response. Regional Forest Service staff, in coordination with Washington Office support, are also drafting a sub-geographic, local operating plan that could include local fire departments, the Forest Service, and Oregon. This operating plan would tier to the Oregon Master Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement.

Currently, all jurisdictions in Oregon have participated in local preseason cooperator meetings with partners and local landowners to discuss fire readiness and any changes in staffing or policy. Personnel from the Forests that border other regions or Forests are also meeting to discuss border issues and staffing and policy changes.

The Region's local agreements for local response are in place and are teered off the Oregon Master Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement. Our ability to use local fire department personnel for Incident Management teams is still limited in Oregon due to our lack of an approved template to use in setting up these types of agreements. We hope to have that completed soon so we can continue to use the local fire department personnel with our Incident Management Teams.