June 6, 2022

Randy Moore, Chief  
US Forest Service  
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building  
201 14th St SW,  
Washington, DC 20227

Dear Chief Moore:

We fully support the USDA Forest Service’s (FS) concerns over the safe and effective application of prescribed fire and your leadership to reverse a century of fire exclusion in the context of a rapidly warming climate. As fire scientists and land managers affiliated with the international Association for Fire Ecology (AFE), we share your concerns about wildland fires and the ecological and human communities they impact and understand the intent of this pause.

Prescribed fires are a critical tool for “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America’s Forests” that you and Secretary Vilsack launched in January. Thank you for your leadership on this important document. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and its explicit investment in prescribed fire, ecosystem health, and safeguarding human communities provides strong support to the American people for living more securely with the inevitable return of fire.

Today, we ask you to consider re-instating prescribed burning in areas on US National Forests that are not in extreme drought during the 90-day pause. For example, Regions 8 and 9 are not currently experiencing drought, have a long history of success stories with prescribed fire, and show strong need for growing season burning. The recent NOAA drought forecast for the US shows that much of the area of Regions 8 and Region 9 will be amenable to continued burning actions. Moreover, allowing FS scientists to collect data on prescribed burns conducted by non-federal partners during this period would likewise maintain a national leadership stance in the study of prescribed fire. Once the national review is complete and it is deemed safe to do so, we ask that you consider re-instating prescribed burning in the American Southwest and the western US, even if this occurs before the end of the 90-day pause.

Prescribed fire is implemented on ~10 MM ac annually, exceeding the extent of US wildfires in most years. Across many diverse applications and a large suite of practitioners, prescribed burning escapes are exceedingly rare. Our best data suggest that 99.7 to 99.8% of all prescribed fires stay within their boundaries and achieve the intended prescription; an even larger percentage avoid any damage to homes and other assets. Due to the excellent leadership of your agency and other state, NGO, and federal partners, escapes have declined precipitously in recent decades. Escaped prescribed fires are thus newsworthy. However, the data support their extreme rarity and speak to the advances in training and implementation that the Forest Service and their partners have led.

Our nation’s forests need prescribed fire now more than ever. Prescribed fires are a primary tool to abate wildfire risks, to expand strategic and tactical locations for more effective suppression actions, and to maintain fuels in a state that is easier and safer to manage. Prescribed fires are critical to restoring ecosystem resilience of native plant and animal communities and to other stressors, and to improving the vigor of forests warmed and dried by climate change. Maintaining managers’ abilities to implement prescribed fire is vital to our shared future.
Much like the well-intentioned fire suppression policies of the past, we will never reach a “no escapes” prescribed burning future. We applaud pressing agency scientists and managers to continuously improve knowledge and practice with prescribed fire, fire behavior modeling, fire weather prediction, and continued investment in world-class fire training. The Association for Fire Ecology is committed to partnering with you to build these tools and their scientific underpinning.

Respectfully,

Co-Signing Members of the Association for Fire Ecology

Theodore Adams, AFE Certified Fire Ecologist and Practitioner
Christopher Adlam, Regional Fire Specialist, Oregon State University Extension Service
Heather Alexander, Associate Professor of Forest and Fire Ecology, Auburn University
Ernesto Alvarado, Professor of Wildland Fire Sciences, University of Washington
Norman Arendt, Consultant, Arendt Safety Consulting
Mary Nell Armstrong, Outreach Specialist, Southern Fire Exchange
Nicholas Baumgartner, Wildland Firefighter, BIA
Matt Behrens, Fire Effects Monitor, NPS
Seth Warren Bigelow, Senior Research Ecology, Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy
Gabrielle Boisrame, Assistant Research Professor, Desert Research Institute
Paul Brewer, Farmer/Landowner, Retired Fire Chief
Eric Brubaker, GRA, Auburn University
Margit Bucher, TNC NC Fire Manager (retired)
Clarah Buhman, Student, UW- Stevens Point Fire Crew
C. Alina Cansler, Research Scientist, University of Washington
Daniel Chatterton, Senior Biologist, Mountain Engineering
Derek Churchill PhD, Affiliate Faculty, School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, University of Washington
John Cissel, Retired, Former Director, Joint Fire Science Program
Adam Coates, Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech
Susan Conard, Retired USFS Fire R&D National Program Leader, Affiliate Faculty, George Mason University
Joseph Connolly, Graduate Student, University of Idaho
Ariel Cowan, Regional Fire Specialist, Oregon State University Extension
Raelene Crandall, Assistant Professor of Fire Ecology, University of Florida
Steve Croy, Ecologist / Fire Planner (retired), U.S. Forest Service
Michael Daugherty, Current Master of Science in Forestry Student, Northern Arizona University
Steven Dicks, Chief Information Officer - Retired, SWFWMD
Greg Dillon, Director, Fire Modeling Institute, USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station
Jimmy Dodson, Fire Ecologist, Registered Forester, & Wildlife Biologist, Natural Resource Professional
Michael Duever, Ecologist, Natural Ecosystems
Tara Durboraw, Doctoral Student, UC Denver
Phillip Dye, CEO, Prometheus Fire Consulting LLC
Alex Dye, Research Associate, Oregon State University
David Engle, Rangeland Consultant, Oklahoma State University (retired)
Todd Engstrom, President, Friends of the Apalachicola National Forest
Louisa Evers, Retired, Formerly Forest Service and BLM
Rich Fairbanks, CEO, Fairbanks Forest Management LLC
Donald Falk, Professor, University of Arizona
Jennifer Fawcett, President, NC Prescribed Fire Council
Thomas Fielden, Fire Management Officer, National Park Service
Lars Filson, Wildland Fire Technician, Association for Fire Ecology
Graham Frank, PhD Candidate, Oregon State University
Tucker Furniss, Postdoc Research Fellow, Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education
Colin Gallagher, Fuels Reduction Coordinator, East Bay Regional Park District
Nathan Gill, Assistant Professor of Fire Ecology, Texas Tech University
Robert Gray, Wildland Fire Ecologist, R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd
Chris Guiterman, Research Scientist, University of Colorado, Boulder
Linnea Hardlund, Graduate Student, UC Berkeley
Stephen C. Hart, Research Professor of Ecology, University of California Merced
Brandyn Harvey, Wildland Fire Specialist, USDA
Lauren F. Howard, Associate Professor of Biology, Arcadia University
Jean Huffman, Fire Ecologist, Louisiana State University/Tall Timbers
Matthew Hurteau, Professor, University of New Mexico
Timothy Ingalsbee, Executive Director, Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology (FUSEE)
Frances C. James, Professor Emerita, Florida State University
Nicholas Jeros, Fuels, USFS
Lane Johnson, Research Forester, University of Minnesota Cloquet Forestry Center
Mark Kaib, Retired Fire Ecologist, USFWS
Jeffrey Kane, Associate Professor of Fire Ecology and Fuels Management, Cal Poly Humboldt
Robert Keane, Research Ecologist, Retired
Shawn Kelley, Regional Fire Ecologist, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Maureen Kennedy, Associate Professor, University of Washington Tacoma, School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences
Alexander Kind, FFT2, National Park Service
Kurt Kipfmueller, Associate Professor, University of Minnesota
Tim Kirkpatrick, RB2, FFT2, FF2, Engineer, NMRxFireCouncil member
Spencer Klinefelter, Graduate Student, SJSU
Samuel Knuth, Environmental Professional, BYU
Mark Kreider, PhD student, University of Montana
Alexandra Lalor, Graduate Researcher, University of Arizona
Johanna D Landsberg, Ph.D, Fire Ecology, Project Leader, Silviculture Laboratory, PNW, Bend, OR, retired, USDA, FS, Retired; Association for Fire Ecology
Richard Lasko, USFS/Retired, Citizen
George LoCascio, Assistant Professor, Mount Wachusett Community College
Alan Long, Professor Emeritus, University of Florida
Tony Marks-Block, Assistant Professor, California State University, East Bay
Ron Masters, Emeritus Professor of Wildland Fire and Forestry, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Jean McCollom, Biologist, Natural Ecosystems
Garrett Meigs, PhD, Forest Health Scientist, Olympia, WA
Jessica Miesel, PhD, Associate Professor, Fire and Ecosystem Ecology, Michigan State University
Penelope Morgan, PhD, Professor Emerita and AFE Certified Senior Fire Ecologist, University of Idaho, Dept. Forest, Rangeland, and Fire Sciences
Ali Moss, Graduate student, University of Georgia
Arthur Lamounier Moura, Graduate Research Assistant, Auburn University
Rick Mowery, Fire Ecologist, USDA Forest Service
Kristin Nesbit, Graduate Student, Utah State University
Ty Nietupski, Postdoctoral Fellow, USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station
Gunnar Ohlson, Graduate Research Assistant, Colorado State University
Brian Oswald, Joe C. Denman Distinguished Professor of Forestry, Stephen F. Austin State University
Emily Palmer, Forestry Technician, USFS
William Patterson III, Emeritus Professor, University of Massachusetts/Amherst
Scott Pokswinski, Deputy Director, Fire Science Applications, Tall Timbers
Susan Prichard, Research Scientist, School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, University of Washington
Fabiola Pulido-Chavez, PhD candidates, University of California-Riverside
Jinny Reed, Ecologist
Rose Richardson, Stewardship Manager, Inland Northwest Land Conservancy
Kevin Robertson, Fire Ecology Program Director, Tall Timbers Research Station
Barbara Satink Wolfson, Senior Program Coordinator, Southwest Fire Science Consortium
Ryan Schneider, Student, SAFE Chapter at University of Idaho
John Schuyler, Retired
Francisco Seijo, Professor of Practice of Environmental Politics, Instituto de Empresa School of Global and Public Affairs Madrid, Spain
Rosemary Sherriff, Professor, Cal Poly Humboldt
Ben Sikes, Associate Professor /Scientist, University of Kansas
Carl Skinner, Research Geographer (Retired)
Marek Smith, North America Fire Director, The Nature Conservancy
Ralph Smith, Director, Smith Bushfire Consultants Pty Ltd
Jared Stachiw, Biologist, Ontario Parks
Michael Stambaugh, Associate Professor, University of Missouri
Zack Steel, Postdoctoral Researcher, UC Berkeley
Scott Stephens, Professor of Fire Science, University of California, Berkeley
Camille Stevens-Rumann, Assistant Professor, Colorado State University
Katja Svendsen, Teacher, Sonoma County Regional Parks
Thomas Swetnam, Regents Professor Emeritus, Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, University of Arizona
Jacob Tepsa, Fire Effects Officer, UWSP Fire Crew
Wade Tinkham, Assistant Professor, Colorado State University
Chris Underwood, Associate Professor, Environmental Science and Conservation, University of Wisconsin-Platteville
J. Morgan Varner, Director of Research & Sr. Scientist, Tall Timbers Research Station
Stephen Wasp, Forestry Technician/ Graduate Student, University of Florida/ National Park Service
Andrew Whelan, Research Associate, The Jones Center at Ichauway
Kate Wilkin, Assistant Professor of Fire Ecology, San Jose State University
Neil Williams, Postdoctoral Scholar, University of Oregon
Kevin Willson, Graduate Student, University of New Mexico
Jamie Woolet, Graduate Student, Colorado State University
Larissa Yocom, Assistant Professor, Utah State University
Kristopher Young, Wildfire Researcher, University of Utah