

# Obama pitches wildfire plan to governors

By Ivan Moreno

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — President Barack Obama on Monday encouraged a group of governors to support a plan to pay for wildfire suppression, and the proposal got a positive reception from the 10 leaders gathered for an annual summit.

Obama made the pitch by telephone to governors meeting in Colorado Springs at the Western Governors Association conference. Under the plan, the federal government would budget money for fighting wildfires instead of raiding funding allocated for mitigation efforts.

The change is pending in Congress, and Obama encouraged the governors to urge enactment.

Fighting wildfires this year will cost about \$1.8 billion, Agriculture Department Secretary Tom Vilsack told the governors on the call. That's \$470 million more than Congress has budgeted.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Vilsack repeated the administration's argument that it's better to directly budget money for firefighting than to shift money from prevention efforts.

"That's precisely the money that we would use to do the kind of wildland, wildfire preparedness, forest restoration and other activities that over time would reduce the risk of these fires, or at least reduce the intensity of them," Vilsack said.

The governors got a report from the Agriculture Department showing what prevention projects in their states have been delayed because of funding shifts.

"I think it really does make sense to actually dedicate the money to putting out the fires and not robbing from the mitigation efforts," Montana Gov. Steve Bullock said.

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, who chairs the WGA, said governors would urge Congress to support the plan, "and make sure that they recognize that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."



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Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper speaks Monday at a Western Governors Association news conference in Colorado Springs, Colo. The governors addressed wildfire prevention as a way to maintain watershed quality. Julia Moss/The Colorado Springs Gazette

The new spending strategy may not be in place for this wildfire season, depending on when Congress considers it, Vilsack said. Still, he added that having a new plan would provide predictability for future years.

During the telephone meeting, Vilsack said the governors were also given a wildfire outlook for the season and briefed on what the administration is doing to increase resources to fight blazes by air.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy was expected to speak to the governors on Tuesday, a week after announcing big cuts in pollution produced by the country's power plants.

Other governors attending the conference are Jan Brewer of Arizona, C.L. "Butch" Otter of Idaho, Sam Brownback of Kansas, Jack Dalrymple of North Dakota, Dennis Daugaard of South Dakota, Matt Mead from Wyoming and Gary Herbert of Utah.