

**COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES**

SUBCOMMITTEES:
CAPITAL MARKETS AND
GOVERNMENT SPONSORED ENTERPRISES
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND CONSUMER CREDIT
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

WESTERN CAUCUS
CHAIRMAN

UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



2432 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

OFFICE NUMBERS
(575) 522-0771 NEW MEXICO
(202) 225-2365 WASHINGTON, D.C.

WWW.PEARCE.HOUSE.GOV
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/REPSTEVEPEARCE
WWW.TWITTER.COM/REPSTEVEPEARCE
WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/NMSTEVEPEARCE

STEVAN PEARCE
Second District, New Mexico

June 19, 2012

Mr. Tom Tidwell, Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Tidwell,

I am writing you on behalf of my constituents in the Second Congressional District of New Mexico, who are deeply concerned about the recently ignited Whitewater-Baldy Complex and Little Bear fires. Specific criticisms of the US Forest Service's (the Service) response to the fires have been raised. The motto of the Service is "Caring for the land, and serving the people." It seems that in the case of the Gila and the Lincoln National Forests, the Service is neglecting the latter part of its motto.

First, I would like to thank you for your willingness to meet and answer questions. While we may disagree on the right way to manage the forest, I do know that I can expect candid answers from you. It is imperative that a dialogue exist between all branches of government.

Second, I want to recognize the firefighters and other first responders who have put their lives on the line during these tragedies. They show us by example what it means to have a servant's heart. The bravery shown by our firefighters, who worked around the clock to contain these conflagrations, must be recognized and praised.

Oftentimes during crises such as the wildfire season, the rumor mills run unchecked, and this can make the jobs of everyone involved more and more difficult. Therefore, the best way to avoid unproven information from getting into the mainstream of opinion is to be as open as possible. For the safety of our constituents, it is imperative that we communicate in an open and candid manner.

Unfortunately, it appears that federal agencies these days are more interested in dodging questions than answering them truthfully. **I want to make it clear that I will personally hold your agency accountable for the response to this summer's fires and their aftermath.** The people deserve simple answers to their basic questions. They have a right to know how this happened, and what the federal government intends to do to keep tragedies like the Whitewater-Baldy and Little Bear fires from occurring again.

Specifically, I would like to get a full report on the Whitewater/Baldy Complex and the Little Bear Fires up to and including the following details:

- 1) Time and method of first report.
- 2) Reported to whom.
- 3) Time, number, and type of fire suppression resources dispatched.
- 4) Time of arrival of first responders and size up report by first responders.
- 5) Actions taken to contain/control the fire by first responders.
- 6) A running account by times of orders for additional specific resources by the IC.
- 7) Orders filled and arrival times.
- 8) A running account of actions and accomplishments by on-site firefighting resources.
- 9) Were aerial firefighting resources ordered and used?, if so,
 - a. When?
 - b. How?
 - c. Number by type
 - d. Number water/retardant drops and total gallons
 - e. Accomplishments
- 10) If aerial resources were not ordered or were denied, please explain why.
- 11) What was known about the fuel loading and condition in these areas?
- 12) How was the weather before the fire, and how was it projected to be in the immediate 24, 48 and 96 hours after the fires started?
- 13) What is the past history of fires in these areas at this time of the year?
- 14) What is the fire experience and local knowledge of person making the IA decisions?

I also request information on all wildfires occurring within the National Forest System where the U. S. Forest Service had primary fire suppression responsibility from January 1, 2000 to the present that fall under the following categories:

- 1) Escaped prescribed burns.
- 2) Lightning caused fires in a wilderness area which were allowed to burn to accomplish management objectives and escaped planned control lines. Include fires which did not escape in a separate listing.
- 3) All unplanned non-lightning caused fires within a Wilderness Area which were allowed to burn to accomplish management objectives & escaped planned control lines. Include fires which did not escape in a separate listing.
- 4) All unplanned fires, including lightning caused fires, outside a wilderness area which were allowed to burn to accomplish management objectives and escaped planned control lines.
- 5) All fires that escaped initial and extended attack and exceeded 1,000 acres in size.
- 6) All fires that did not have full suppression that do not fit any of the previous categories and escaped planned control lines.

For all of the above categories provide the following data for each fire:

- 1) Fire name, date, and location.
- 2) Acres burned.
- 3) Fire suppression cost.
- 4) Resource damage assessment in dollars.
- 5) Public and private losses in dollars.
- 6) Elapsed time from report of fires to initial attack.
- 7) Type and number of initial attack resources dispatched to the fire per hour the first day.
- 8) Estimate of the overall economic loss to local communities.
- 9) Effects of prolonged smoke to public health.
- 10) Estimated tons of carbon emitted.

Finally, for the purpose of clear definitions in the questions that follow, irrespective of what descriptive terms may be used in an official report, the information requested is for all fires which did not have full suppression and/or escaped pre-determined control lines. Please provide the following information for each fire over 100 acres (show name, date, and location –specify if wilderness) which did not receive full suppression and/or escaped from 2007 thru 2011 on NFS lands in the 11 Western States:

- 1) Size at time of discovery and time of discovery.
- 2) Time of arrival of initial attack forces including number & type or resources.
- 3) Size of fire at time of arrival of initial attack forces.
- 4) Actions taken by initial attack forces.
- 5) Time of arrival of reinforcements including number & type.
- 6) Size of fire at time of escape, include date & time.
- 7) Acreage of the fire at final control including a breakdown between NFS land & private or other jurisdiction lands.
- 8) Date of final control.
- 9) Suppression and resource damage cost.
- 10) Private structures burned.
- 11) Resource damage to private land.
- 12) Damages paid due to claims/lawsuits from private parties.
- 13) Resource/ecological benefits achieved.

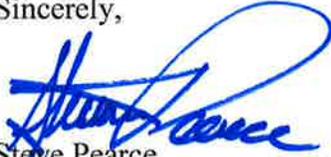
In addition, please provide the following:

- 1) After Action Reports and 209s for each fire.
- 2) Identify fires where suppression action was held up due to delayed decisions on whether full suppression or other alternative methods of managing the fire would be chosen. Indicate the length of the delay.
- 3) Identify prescribed fires that escaped including answers to questions 1 thru 13 above and After Action and other reports that address the escape.
- 4) Please define in detail the term “Full Suppression.”
- 5) Please define in detail the term “Multiple Objective Strategy.”

I believe you will be a cooperative partner in this pursuit of a more open, honest and accountable federal government. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Pearce", with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Steve Pearce
Member of Congress

CC: Chairman Rob Bishop, US House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and
Public Lands