

# The Sequester Hits States Reliant on Federal Timber Sales

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August 2013

Last week, the U.S. Forest Service announced plans to take a portion of the timber payments it has previously promised or paid out to 22 states. According to the service, these cuts are the direct result of federal budget cuts and the sequester.

The Chief of the Forest Service sent collection letters from to 22 governors explaining that money would be taken from funds used for habitat improvement and other national forest-related projects. These programs create jobs under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

Oregon could lose about \$4 million, leaving the state with about \$3.4 million for its program. California could lose \$2.2 million; Idaho could lose \$1.7 million; Montana nearly \$1.3 million and Alaska about \$930,000, or about one-half of its planned effort.

Earlier this year, the chief asked 41 states to return \$17.9 million in timber payments used to pay for schools, roads, search, and rescue operations in rural counties and conservation projects.

Why does the Forest Service need cash? According press reports, the agency has run out of current year funds to fight forest fires and is reportedly in the process of diverting \$600 million from other line items for wildland firefighting efforts. A Forest Service spokesman claimed, however, that the collections under the Secure Rural Schools Act since March were begun "well before any decision was made regarding transfer of fire funds."

In the meantime, Congress is in recess until September 9, while record fire costs and a significant drought wreak havoc in the Western states.