

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0902

June 1, 2022

Honorable Zach Ducheneaux
Administrator
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Administrator Ducheneaux,

I write today regarding the funds included in the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-20) that were authorized for the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)¹. After P.L. 116-20 was signed into law on June 6, 2019, I appreciated the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) implementation of EFRP and the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) work to obligate the funds to non-industrial, private forest owners. These funds were necessary to mitigate the damages suffered by hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, floods, and other natural disasters. However, as you understand, the cleanup process is burdensome and can take years to complete.

P.L. 116-20 established \$480 million for EFRP, "to remain available until expended." Recently, the USDA confirmed that of the EFRP funds authorized by P.L. 116-20, over \$287 million dollars remain unallocated and have not been committed to any State or county. I continue to hear from many foresters across the Second District of Florida regarding the urgent need to dispose of downed timber and reforest their lands. Also, I am concerned that many successful applicants in my district are still waiting for the awards to be distributed.

Downed timber largely contributed to the forest fires that spread across my district at the beginning of March 2022. I thank the USDA for announcing that the impacted counties were eligible for EFRP². At the federal level I stand ready to assist these counties and FSA offices with their work to support the affected producers and ensure these lands are properly cleaned up to prevent wildfires from spreading again. Fortunately, no lives were lost; but this event clearly demonstrates the urgent need to review federal programs that could work more efficiently and effectively to maintain our nation's forests.

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ20/PLAW-116publ20.pdf>

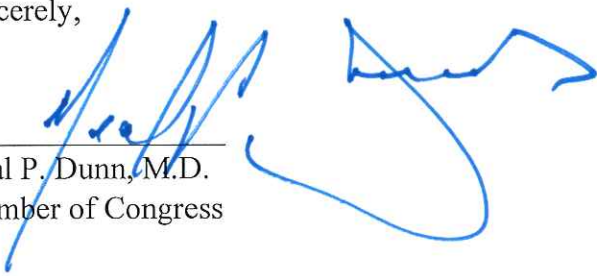
² <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/fl/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCSEPRD1902227>

The Second District of Florida is regularly threatened by natural disasters; therefore, I respectfully request that you answer the following questions so I can effectively inform my constituents as our nation begins another hurricane season:

1. In general, when EFRP funds are first made available, how does FSA ensure local FSA offices are prepared to inform foresters and the communities of these available funds?
2. Staffing continues to be an issue at local FSA offices across the country. What steps do you take to ensure there is adequate staffing available to handle incoming applications?
3. Public-private partnerships are essential to helping communities rebuild following a natural disaster. How does FSA ensure local leaders are establishing active private-public partnerships in their communities to respond to potential disasters?
4. Does FSA consult with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop strategies for hurricane debris and downed timber cleanup?
5. What are the eligibility requirements of the remaining EFRP funds established by P.L. 116-20? Are there any considerations to waive or extend expired deadlines that could impact eligibility?

Thank you for your commitment to these important issues affecting the forests and foresters.

Sincerely,



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress