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**(S.D.)- SD Wildfire Head Worries About Federal Budget Cuts**

By: Brady McDaniel Posted at: 09/01/2013 01:22 PM

(Associated Press)

The director of South Dakota's Wildland Fire Division says he's worried that federal budget cuts could hurt the state's efforts to prevent and fight fires in the Black Hills.

The U.S. Forest Service has spent \$967 million fighting wildfires this year and has only \$50 million left in suppression funds. The federal agency plans to divert \$600 million from timber, recreation and other areas to fill the firefighting gap.

Jay Esperance, director of the South Dakota Wildland Fire Division, says the state stands to lose federal money that helps prevent fires from starting or spreading. He says that also would mean losing actual firefighters.

Esperance says automatic federal budget cuts have already reduced the number of firefighters staffed by the federal government.

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