

“Forest Eco” Podcast & Radio Module

Southern Research Station
U.S. Forest Service
Asheville, N.C.

“The Costs of Fighting Fires”

Length: 2 minutes

(Air from October 2009 through September 2010)

(open with natural forest sound)

(narrator)

From Virginia to Florida, Texas to Kentucky... This is Forest Eco

Every year, wildfire scorches millions of acres of forests in the West and Southeast.

U.S. Forest Service spending, alone, has averaged 1 billion dollars a year over the past ten years. But this amount varies widely from year to year.

So with wildfire being so variable, how do Forest Service officials and other decision makers in Washington budget for firefighting costs?

(Jeff Prestemon, length: 8 seconds)

“We forecast what we term “emergency suppression expenditures,” or “suppression costs,” of the U.S. Forest Service using statistical models.”

(narrator)

That’s Jeff Prestemon. He’s one of several economists in the Forest Service who develop models that forecast how much the agency will spend putting out fires each year.

(Prestemon, length: 16 seconds)

“These models really are applied to nine geographical units called Forest Service regions and they relate to suppression spending by region to climate variables such as ocean temperatures and pressure indices, drought measures, and time trends.”

(narrator)

Prestemon says the forecasts do not include such things as the value of timber lost or houses destroyed. Once compiled, Prestemon and his colleagues share their forecasts with Forest Service officials so they can budget accordingly.

He says that natural processes can cause wide fluctuations in fire activity and in firefighting costs from year to year. Prestemon adds that there has been an upward trend in suppression costs - amounting to an extra 15 to 20 million dollars annually.

Jeff Prestemon also has this week’s Forest Eco tip...tailored to folks living in fire prone areas.

(Prestemon, length: 8 seconds)

“For homeowners living in these places, clearing away vegetation near the house may help firefighters protect it if a wildfire approaches.”

(narrator)

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For ‘Forest Eco’...I’m Stevin Westcott”

(close with natural forest sound)