Monday, May 2, 2022
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Representative David Cook Calls on U.S. Forest Service to Conduct Facilitated Learning Analyses on Telegraph, Woodbury & Tunnel Fires

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – State Representative David Cook today sent a letter to Michiko Martin, Southwestern Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service, asking for an official Facilitated Learning Analysis (FLA) to be conducted on three highly destructive fires that have burned in our state in recent years – Woodbury (2019), Telegraph (2021), and Tunnel (2022).

The FLA process is a tool the Forest Service and other organizations use internally to review and foster learning from unintended outcomes of a fire event. Analyses can lead to improved practices, safety, and outcomes with future fires.

Representative Cook believes an FLA is a necessary and important means to improve fire management and reduce damage and property loss in future events.

A copy of Representative Cook’s letter is attached.

David Cook is a Republican member of the Arizona House of Representatives serving Legislative District 8, which includes areas of Pinal and Gila Counties. Follow him on Twitter at @RepDavidCook.

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Arizona House of Representatives
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

May 2, 2022

Michiko Martin, Regional Forester
333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Re: Woodbury, Telegraph and Tunnel Fires.

Ms. Martin,

In Arizona and through the Southwest Region, recent fires and fire management strategies has had a compounding economic and devastating effect on communities, businesses and private property.

On Wednesday, April 27, 2022, Representative Tom O’Halleran held a “Town Hall” telephone call regarding the recent fires here in Arizona. During that call, citizens noted they had retained a private fire investigator to investigate the cause and management of the fire. A question on whether the Forest Service would use the information produced by the investigator, Representative O’Halleran responded that any resulting information should be provided to their local law enforcement agencies such as the Sheriff’s Department.

There’s room for meaningful Forest Service action on this situation. I am asking your agency to immediately initiate a Facilitated Learning Analysis on the Arizona Woodbury and Telegraph Fires and on the Tunnel Fire after its termination date. It is critical that the Forest Service use all possible sources of information to study these fires and work to ensure that any mistakes made in managing the fires not be repeated. Arizonans believe that the high number of homes destroyed in these fires is unacceptable and should be avoided in the future if possible.

Some examples of the effect these fires have had or currently are having are as follows;

The Woodbury Fire in 2019 affected 123,875 acres and Brent Davidson was the Incident Commander in charge. State Route 88 (Apache Trail), starting past Tortilla Flat to State Highway 188 at Theodore Roosevelt Dam, was closed. Apache Lake, the Marina, Apache Campgrounds, and picnic sites were also closed. Today, three years later, the State Highway remains closed affecting tourism and businesses associated with recreation on Apache Lake and the surrounding communities.

The Telegraph Fire burned 180,757 acres where Dave Bales was the Incident Commander and as of June 19, 2021, 51 structures have been deemed destroyed by the fire, including 22 buildings in El Capitan. Numerous state highway closures were caused including State Route 77, State Route 177, US 70 and US 60. These closures affected numerous citizens and their travel to employment, doctor appointments and much more. The fire and subsequent flooding events have devastated local communities and businesses that are still severely impacted today.

The Tunnel Fire is currently estimated at 20,000 acres and Matt Brown is the Incident Commander. The Coconino County Sheriff's Office reported on April 21 that about 109 properties have been impacted by the fire, including 30 burned residences and 24 properties with destroyed outbuildings. Road closures include US 89.

Based off this information, I hope you can begin these important tasks as soon as possible. If you decide not to begin the analysis of these fires, please let me know and the reasoning for such a decision. However, if I can be of any assistance, please let me know. I have attached the analysis on the Pole Creek Fire as an example of such work.1

Best Regards,

David Cook
Representative, District 8

CC: US Senator Mark Kelly
    US Senator Sinema
    US Congressman Paul Gosar
    US Congressman Tom O’Halleran