

Sen. Cantwell Actions on Wildfire Funding and Preparedness

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) serves as ranking member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, the committee with direct oversight of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS), as well as a senior member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which has oversight of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

In both roles, she's served as a stalwart defender of the nation's emergency readiness in the face of reckless attempted cuts from the Trump administration. As wildfires in the West become more frequent and intense, Sen. Cantwell is working to ensure communities have access to the resources to prevent, prepare for, fight, and recover from major wildfires.

Sen. Cantwell [led the charge](#) to prevent massive budget cuts pursued by the Trump administration that would have eliminated funding for volunteer wildland firefighters, training, and equipment that private, local, and state landowners use to reduce wildland fire risk.

In June, Sen. Cantwell [led](#) eight of her colleagues from Washington state in sending a [letter](#) to USFS Chief Tom Schultz and U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins opposing the proposed closure of the Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Wenatchee and the Pacific Wildland Fire Sciences Laboratory in Seattle, both of which conduct crucial science for wildfire prevention and forecasting. The letter cited the signs of a dangerous fire season, noting that **"so far this year, 32,812 fires have already burned more than 2.5 million acres nationwide, nearly double the number of acres burned by this time last year. The West is approaching the heights of wildfire season, and it is predicted in less than 30 days, the entire Pacific Northwest will be under threat of severe wildfire and smoke."** They warned, **"Now is not the time to shutter federal labs that support smoke forecasts and wildfire prevention."**

In May, Sen. Cantwell [quizzed](#) Schultz on the Trump administration's abrupt change to the Department of Agriculture's "terms and conditions" for federal funding that has for years have gone to help states fight wildfires and manage forests. These new terms effectively blocked states, particularly Democratic states, from receiving desperately needed federal support ahead of an active wildfire season. Cantwell told Schultz, **"because of the new restrictions on the Department of Agriculture's grants and contracts, the state of Washington cannot release \$49 million in funding to help fight fires and manage our forests. That includes \$28 million in Community Wildfire Defense Grants, and means [the] Spokane Valley Fire [Department] has not received over \$5 million to prepare for wildfire[s]."** Cantwell noted the Malden fire, and also warned Schultz directly – following her similar warnings to him in 2025 – **"some people have said Spokane could be the first major city [to experience a major fire]. And then we obviously had the Palisades fire. Now we have a Spokane Valley Fire [Department] person saying we are trying to avoid being the Palisades. And yet they're not getting the money to help alleviate this risk."**

In September 2025, Sen. Cantwell's Fire Ready Nation Act [passed](#) the U.S. Senate unanimously. The bipartisan Fire Ready Nation Act would formally establish a permanent Fire Weather Services program within NOAA and authorize funding for new technologies to forecast weather conditions that cause and impact wildfires.

In July 2025, Sen. Cantwell [grilled](#) Schultz about why the Trump Administration was withholding an estimated \$20 million from DNR for the 2025 firefighting season and future fire seasons. Those funds

came from the FY25 State, Private, and Tribal Forestry program – yet another program that President Trump’s budget would have eliminated. Cantwell warned Schultz, **“The Wildland Urban Interface should be debated every day of the week now, because what we're finding is that we almost had literally a fire approach Spokane. I mean, there are people who are looking at and saying, not where the next fire like the Palisades or like Hawaii, but people are saying the next event is going to be something that goes all the way from the WUI to a major urban city and could cause that much damage. And that's what happened outside of Spokane last summer.”**

In March 2025 – following reports of widespread firings across the USFS and the USDA – Sen. Cantwell sent a [letter](#) to USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins and Schultz requesting immediate reinstatement, as well as more details about the fired Washington state personnel certified for wildland firefighting.

She [secured](#) billions of dollars to support wildfire prevention, response, and recovery in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. In January 2024, Sen. Cantwell [co-introduced](#) the Making Aid for Local Disasters Equal Now (MALDEN) Act, a bipartisan proposal to improve coordination between local, state, tribal, and federal agencies to deliver resources faster in the aftermath of disastrous wildfires. The MALDEN Act is named for the town of Malden, WA, which was destroyed by the 2020 Babb Road Fire.

Following 2023’s devastating Gray and Oregon Road fires in Eastern Washington, Sen. Cantwell [sent a letter](#) to the Biden administration in support of Gov. Inslee’s request for a Major Disaster Declaration, and [sent another letter](#) in January 2024 asking for an immediate update on the status of this request. Shortly after Sen. Cantwell sent that letter, President Biden [declared a major disaster declaration](#) for Spokane County to deliver funding and assistance for residents and business owners.

After the Bolt Creek Fire in 2022, Sen. Cantwell helped [secure](#) emergency funding to stabilize fire-scarred land around Highway 2 near Sultan. Just last year, the Senate unanimously passed two of Sen. Cantwell’s [bipartisan bills](#) to modernize the nation’s weather communication and radio service to keep communities better informed during intense weather events.

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