Benefit to Texans
Population growth combined with changes in land use and intensifying drought conditions have led to increasingly severe wildfire seasons in recent years. And these trends are expected to continue.

The state population has doubled since 1970, which carries significant impact since 95 percent of wildfires are caused by people. Add to that the increasing number of Texans who are moving into previously wild areas, most of whom are unaware of the dangers or how to protect themselves. Previously considered a rural problem, 80 percent of all wildfires now burn within two miles of a community. Making matters worse are the devastating drought conditions that have affected Texas in recent years.

This request strives to make sure firefighters across the state are prepared. Fully funding the Texas Wildfire Protection Plan: TFS Operations will build the capacity of the agency and the state, reducing our depending on costly, out-of-state resources and enhancing the state’s ability to protect the Lone Star State and the families who call it home.

Description and Justification
TFS is the lead agency for the state when it comes to responding to dangerous wildfires. The agency carries out this responsibility via the Texas Wildfire Protection Plan (TWPP). Considered a national model, the plan calls for a five-part approach to disaster response: predictive services, prevention and mitigation, planning and preparedness, local capacity building and rapid response.

During significant wildfire outbreaks, Texas must compete with other states for aircraft, firefighters and equipment. Resources that may not be available — and even when they are, they’re costly.
The Texas Wildfire Protection Plan attacks that problem by boosting state capacity — increasing the number of firefighters and equipment strategically placed across Texas — and reducing the need for out-of-state firefighting resources. The plan was partially funded and launched as a pilot program in 1999. Funding was increased in 2009, when legislators appropriated funding for additional firefighters and equipment in an effort to better protect the state of Texas.

The 2011 Fire Season was the worst in Texas history, during which more than 31,000 wildfires burned more than 4 million acres, destroyed nearly 3,000 homes and killed 10 people.

Considered one of the worst wildfire seasons in state history, the 351-day season saw 10 of the 14 largest wildfires in recorded state history. Those 10 fires don’t include the Bastrop County Complex Fire, during which more homes were destroyed than in any previous wildfire in Texas. State and local responders were pushed to the limit during the devastating season, which ran from Nov. 15, 2010 to Oct. 31, 2011.

To aid in the response effort, TFS mobilized 16,690 emergency responders from across all 50 states, including 244 bulldozers, 986 engines and 255 aircraft. By the end of the season, wildfire response costs exceeded $300 million for local, state and federal resources. The 82nd Legislature provided the agency with $121 in emergency appropriations and TFS will seek additional emergency funding during the 83rd legislative session. Fully implementing the Texas Wildfire Protection Plan would help reduce the state’s dependence on out-of-state resources, which would help cut wildfire response costs.

To do this, TFS is requesting for FY 2014 and FY 2015 an additional $13.6 million per year ($27.2 million total for the biennium).

This exceptional item would fund 100 new FTE positions including 90 firefighters. It also would fund the purchase of new firefighting equipment (i.e. dozers and graders) that could be strategically located across the state to improve response times.