Legislative & Policy Update – April 2020
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The *Council of Western State Foresters* (CWSF) *Legislative & Policy Update* provides information on issues of importance to CWSF. Policy and legislative updates are found on the CWSF webpage here. Please note that the items highlighted in these updates are only a selection of the issues CWSF and the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC) are monitoring. Keep an eye out for our monthly newsletter that will provide summaries on other key legislative and programmatic issues. If you have not yet subscribed, you can do so here. For more information, please contact Danielle Okst, Associate Policy and Grants Director at dokst@westernforesters.org.

Congress passed the third coronavirus stimulus package, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, containing $339.855 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations. The Wildfire and Community Health Response Act was introduced and would require the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to provide information to support firefighters and emergency response teams and address issues of wildfire impacts on vulnerable populations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. State and federal agencies are coordinating plans to address related challenges of firefighter training and incident safety protocols.

The CARES Act (H.R. 748)

The CARES Act passed the House on March 27 after passage in the Senate and was subsequently signed into law by the President. The bill allocates $70.8 million to the Forest Service, with $3 million to go to Forest Rangeland and Research, $34 million to the National Forest System, $26.8 million to Capital Improvements and Maintenance, and $7 million to Wildland Fire Management. These funds are going to reestablish abandoned experiments, disinfect public recreation amenities and administrative facilities, and provide protective equipment and baseline testing for first responders.

Additionally, the Act provides support for firefighters. Fire departments can apply for grants under the Assistance to Firefighter Grants program for COVID-19 expenses, which was allocated $100 million. The Emergency Management Performance Grant Program received $100 million to assist state emergency management agencies with COVID-19 planning and preparedness costs. These funds can be used to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) and emergency supplies. States and local entities can be reimbursed for COVID-19 costs through the Disaster Relief Fund, including overtime and backfill costs, PPE, medical supplies, and disinfectants. The Act provides $45 billion dollars for this fund.

The Wildfire and Community Health Response Act of 2020

The Wildfire and Community Health Response Act was introduced by Representatives Joe Neguse (D-CO) and John Curtis (R-UT) last week. This bipartisan bill would require the Forest Service and BLM to jointly report to Congress on actions to reduce fuels, mitigate wildfire risks, prevent coronavirus spread among

emergency responders, and minimize impacts on communities' respiratory health during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also requires recommendations on the federal support needed to carry out these activities.

Representative Neguse and 33 Members of Congress sent a letter to Vice President Mike Pence, head of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, and Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Robert Redfied, urging prioritization of testing for firefighters, police officers, and other first responders. They highlighted the need for this prioritization while there are testing shortages during wildfire season when self-quarantine can impact critical response capacity.

Interagency Planning for COVID-19 Fire Season

Firefighting agencies are working to coordinate adjusted protocols and strategies to ensure personnel are as safe as possible while maintaining capacity to fight wildfires. Chief Vicki Christiansen released the Chief's Letter of Intent for Wildland Fire - 2020. She outlined the objectives for the 2020 season, including limiting exposure to the extent possible, utilizing risk-based protocols, and undertaking rapid containment through prioritization of local suppression resources.

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group has updated the Infectious Disease Guidance for Wildland Fire Incidents. It provides recommendations for infectious disease prevention, planning, identification, and response during wildland fire incident management activities. The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) has tasked the three Wildland Fire Response Area Command Teams with developing plans in coordination with each Geographic Area Coordination Group. These interagency Wildland Fire Response Plans will provide general strategies, implementation considerations, and recommended best practices to maintain capabilities for initial and extended attack, coordination and support functions, and safety protocols for firefighters. The Fire Management Board (FMB) has activated a COVID-19 coordinator to track related activities between the federal and state agencies engaged in wildland fire.

Maintaining social distancing requires adapting not only to standard operating procedures for fighting fires, but also for trainings and other recertifications normally done in person pre-season. FMB released Federal Guidance for federal wildland fire agency pack tests, refreshers, and other training requirements. Medical standards for federal agency firefighters have been updated in light of COVID-19, including direction for the Department of Interior (DOI), BLM, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and National Park Service. The Forest Service is waiving in-person recertification training for their firefighters in First Aid, CPR, Automated External Defibrillator, and Blood Borne Pathogen for one year.