



Legislative & Policy Update – August 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.

This month, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) officially became law. Senate Republicans outlined their proposal for the next COVID-19 relief package. Negotiations over the next package ended in a stalemate before Congress left for the August recess. Bills aimed at assisting forest landowners and markets (the Rural Forest Markets Act) and fire mitigation and firefighting operations (the Emergency Wildlife and Public Safety Act) were introduced. California joined numerous other western states in formalizing state-federal coordination through the signing of a Shared Stewardship Agreement.

The Great American Outdoors Act

[Senator Cory Gardner \(R-CO\)](#), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Steve Daines (R-MT), Rob Portman (R-OH), Mark Warner (D-VA), Angus King (I-ME), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Richard Burr (R-NC) introduced the Great American Outdoors Act ([S. 3422](#)) on March 9. It combined the Restore Our Parks Act ([S. 500](#)), aimed at addressing the deferred maintenance backlog on public lands, and Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act ([S. 1081](#)), which would permanently fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). S. 3422 passed the Senate on June 17. At the end of July, the House passed the GAOA (H.R. 1957), and it was [signed into law](#) on August 4 ([Public Law 116-152](#)).

This bill establishes the “National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund” which will be funded with 50% of all energy development revenues from oil, gas, coal, or alternative renewable energy development on federal land and water credited, covered, or deposited as miscellaneous receipts in the amount of up to \$1.9 billion per fiscal year (FY) through FY 2025. The funds will be used for priority deferred maintenance projects. At least 65% of the funds allocated to each agency is for non-transportation projects. The remainder is for transportation projects (paved and unpaved roads, bridges, tunnels, and paved parking areas). Percentages of the funds will be distributed to the National Park Service (70%), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (5%), Bureau of Land Management (5%), and Bureau of Indian Education (5%), with the USDA Forest Service receiving 15% of the backlog funds, up to a total of \$285M per FY.

LWCF utilizes earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to support nationwide recreation and conservation areas through programs such as the Forest Legacy Program (FLP), which will see increases as a result of this

legislation. For more information on the GAOA and LWCF, please see the CWSF blog post "[The Great American Outdoors Act: A Western Perspective.](#)"

COVID-19 Relief Legislation

Senate Republicans released their coronavirus relief package proposal, [the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools \(HEALS\) Act](#). This framework includes a second round of \$1,200 direct payments, additional funding for the Paycheck Protection Program, a reduction of the \$600 a month federal unemployment insurance benefits to \$200 a month, liability protection, and funding to support reopening schools and colleges.

Congressional leaders failed to come to agreement during negotiations for the next coronavirus relief package. Democrats' current plan is approximately \$3.4 trillion and Senate Republicans' proposed plan has a \$1 trillion price tag. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said money for state and local governments is a major point of disagreement, with Democrats proposing approximately \$950 billion and Republicans offering \$150 billion. After both chambers went on August recess without coming to an agreement, the president signed several executive orders. The orders are for the purpose of continuing [student loan payment relief](#), [assistance to renters and homeowners](#), [deferring payroll tax obligations](#), and [authorizing the other needs assistance program for major disaster declarations](#).

On Saturday, by a vote of 257-150, the House passed legislation to prevent the U.S. Postal Service from making operational changes that could slow delivery of ballots mailed in for the 2020 election. It would provide \$25 billion to support operations and prevent actions such as removing mail-sorting machines, restricting overtime pay, or not handling election mail as first class. On the Senate side, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has signaled they will not take up this legislation and the White House has threatened to veto the bill. However, the legislation could be a bargaining piece for future negotiations.

The Rural Forests Markets Act

Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Mike Braun (R-IN) [introduced](#) the Rural Forests Markets Act ([S. 4451](#)) this month. The bill aims to open carbon and other markets to family forest landowners and reward landowners that adopt conservation practices that store carbon and reduce greenhouse gases. This legislation hopes to bring "investment into rural communities by reducing the financial risk to private investors who can contribute the upfront financing" that support innovative projects. A fact sheet on S. 4451 is available [here](#).

The Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act

Last week, Senators [Dianne Feinstein \(D-CA\)](#) and Steve Daines (R-MT) introduced the [Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act \(S. 4431\)](#). The bill would establish a fire center in the west to train firefighters and forestry professionals on prescribed fires, create a forestry workforce development program, lift the current export ban on unprocessed timber from federal lands for dead or dying trees, create an incentive program for woody biomass collection, allow disaster mitigation and preparedness funding to be used to reduce utility line wildfire risk, and provide new authority for the USDA Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to work collaboratively with state agencies to implement wildfire mitigation projects based on restorative forest management need. Provisions of the bill would streamline the approval process for management projects and limit the ability of opponents to block them through lawsuits. A section-by-

section summary can be viewed [here](#). Representatives [Doug LaMalfa \(R-CA\)](#) and Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) introduced the companion to this bipartisan bill in the House.

Shared Stewardship in California and Wyoming

California signed a Shared Stewardship Agreement with the Forest Service this month. The agreement includes a commitment by the federal government to match the state’s goal of reducing wildfire risks on 500,000 acres of forest land each year. This is one of the nine specific actions outlined in the agreement to build upon existing collaboration. The press release from Governor Gavin Newsom can be found [here](#) and the agreement [here](#).

On August 25, Wyoming joined the growing list of western states to enter into a Shared Stewardship Agreement. The [Agreement](#) identifies shared principles and priorities and outlines the Forest Service and the state of Wyoming’s commitment to “work together on forest and grassland restoration across all land ownerships, with a focus on protecting at-risk communities and watersheds from wildfire.” You can view the Forest Service’s press release [here](#).

Please see the [Western Forestry Leadership Council’s Shared Stewardship page](#) and the [National Association of State Foresters’ Shared Stewardship page](#) for updates and additional information about Shared Stewardship.