



CWSF
COUNCIL OF WESTERN
STATE FORESTERS

Legislative & Policy Update – January 2018

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The [Council of Western State Foresters \(CWSF\) Legislative & Policy Update](#) provides information on issues of importance to the 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 the CWSF and 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](#).

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The second session of the 115th Congress began in January 2018. Atop Congress' agenda were fiscal year (FY) 2018 appropriations and a January 19 deadline to enact new spending legislation. This month's policy section details the latest on appropriations as well as on wildfire funding and federal forest management, the USDA Forest Service's request for comment on National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance, and the Department of the Interior's (DOI) reorganization proposal.

FY 2018 Appropriations

Upon returning after the holidays, Congress had a short window of time to pass spending legislation before the third Continuing Resolution (CR) of FY 2018 that the federal government was operating under expired on January 19, 2018. Negotiations were ultimately unsuccessful, with the sticking point largely being over an impasse on immigration policy; this resulted in a partial federal government shutdown, which began on January 20. On January 22, an agreement emerged in the Senate and a vote followed that provided for a three-week CR. The Senate passed the bill, the House quickly followed suit, and President Trump signed the legislation, ending the shutdown. The fourth short-term CR runs out February 8. Still to be worked out in Congress is a budget deal that would establish discretionary defense and nondefense funding levels and that would pave the way for appropriators to craft omnibus spending legislation.

Wildfire Funding and Federal Forest Management

The 2017 calendar year came and went without a solution to federal wildfire funding for the USDA Forest Service and DOI. Discussions continue in Congress aimed at finding a compromise that addresses both wildfire funding and modest federal forest management reforms.

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF), in cooperation with CWSF and the other State Forester regional associations, recently sent a [letter](#) to House and Senate leadership asking Congress to address funding for wildfire suppression and to allow for more active and effective management of America's federal forests. NASF and CWSF also remain engaged with the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions Coalition that continues to urge a comprehensive solution to wildfire funding.

Six former Forest Service Chiefs sent a letter to House and Senate leadership in January asking Congress to pass a comprehensive wildfire funding solution. The letter states, “Our nation’s forests are in crisis. On the national forests, current data is showing that around 80 million acres are at high risk of catastrophic fire with potential impacts to over 70,000 communities.” It goes on to say that the Forest Service’s ability to ramp up preventative forest treatments on national forests is, “being impacted by the increasing cost of firefighting and the archaic 10-year average method being used to fund fire suppression.” The letter was signed by former Forest Service Chiefs Max Peterson, F. Dale Robertson, Michael Dombeck, Dale Bosworth, Abigail Kimball, and Thomas Tidwell.

Good Neighbor Authority Improvement Act

Late last year, Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Ron Johnson (R-WI) introduced the [Good Neighbor Authority Improvement Act](#) (S. 2223). The bipartisan bill would amend the 2014 Farm Bill Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to allow for road reconstruction, repair, or restoration of National Forest System roads under a GNA agreement. Currently, the Farm Bill GNA language excludes the construction and reconstruction of paved or permanent roads. A press release by Senator Baldwin on the legislation can be found [here](#). NASF [supports](#) this proposed legislation. Finding a solution to the GNA road reconstruction limitation continues to be a priority for NASF and CWSF.

Wildfire Management Technology Advancement Act

Senator and Ranking Member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Maria Cantwell (D-WA), and Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) introduced the [Wildfire Management Technology Advancement Act](#) this month. In a [press release](#), the bill authors state that the legislation is designed to bring firefighting agencies into the 21st century. Among other items, the bill gets into the use of unmanned aircraft systems, development of a tracking system to remotely locate fire resources assigned to federal Type 1 incident Management Teams, and real-time warnings.

Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act

In early January 2018, the Forest Service issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking and a request for comment on their NEPA compliance. The Agency is interested in revising their NEPA procedures to increase efficiency in their environmental analysis and is seeking comments from the public. The Forest Service cites the growing cost of wildfire suppression, a growing backlog of special use permits, and over 80 million acres of National Forest System lands at risk to wildfire and insects and disease as reasons for needing NEPA procedure reform. Additionally, the Federal Register notice says, “The Agency’s goal is to complete project decision making in a timelier manner, to improve or eliminate inefficient processes and steps, and where appropriate increase the scale and analysis and the amount of activities authorized in a single analysis and decision.” The Federal Register notice can be found [here](#) and the deadline to submit comments is February 2, 2018. The Forest Service press release can be found [here](#).

Department of the Interior Restructuring

DOI recently launched initial planning stages of a major reorganization. DOI Secretary Ryan Zinke shared in a [video](#) that DOI is looking at moving to a management system based on ecosystems, watersheds, and science rather than the current system that utilizes state or regional boundaries. Secretary Zinke went on to say that administrative functions such as budget, personnel, and legal will likely see little change, and that the reorganization will give more flexibility, resources, and decision-making authority to front-line superintendents and managers so that they can act quickly.

In a call with the DOI Associate Deputy Secretary, Jim Cason, he shared additional information on the vision to reorganize the Department, including the 13 draft common regional boundaries for all bureaus. Mr. Cason shared that within each region, the intent is to have all bureaus work more closely together on management issues. He conveyed that no final decision has yet been made and that comments on the proposed restructure may be submitted. He suggested that a tentative timeline for DOI adoption of common regional boundaries is likely to be in spring or summer of 2018. More details are expected in the Administration's FY 2019 budget request.