



Legislative & Policy Update – July 2017

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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](#).

This policy update addresses recent activities relating to the congressional calendars, fiscal year (FY) 2018 appropriations, the upcoming Farm Bill, the Good Neighbor Authority, and wildfire funding. Additionally, short summaries are provided on congressional hearings and markups of interest to CWSF members.

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Congressional Calendars

Earlier this month, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that the Senate will delay the start of their August recess until the third week of August. The originally anticipated start of the recess was July 31. The House is expected to begin their recess at the end of this month. In a statement, Senator McConnell shared that by delaying the recess the Senate will have time to consider items including healthcare, the National Defense Authorization Act and President Trump's Administration nominations

FY 2018 Appropriations Updates

Earlier this month, the House Appropriations Committee released their draft [fiscal year \(FY\) 2018 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies \(Interior\) Appropriations bill](#) which funds the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service), the Department of the Interior (DOI), and the Environmental Protection Agency among others. The bill was quickly reported out of the House Interior Subcommittee to the full Appropriations Committee. The full House Appropriations Committee held a markup on the Interior bill that ran into the evening on July 18. [Four amendments](#) were adopted and the Interior bill was reported from the Appropriations Committee with a vote of 30-21. A webcast of the markup can be viewed [here](#) and the Committee press release is [here](#). The report language that provides additional details to accompany the Interior bill can be found [here](#).

The House Interior bill would provide \$31.4 billion in funding; this is \$824 million below the FY 2017 enacted level and \$4.3 billion above the President's budget request. Some highlights about the legislation include:

- The bill fully funds the 10-year rolling average for wildfire suppression at DOI and the Forest Service. In total, the bill funds wildland firefighting and prevention programs at \$3.4 billion; accounting for 11 percent of the subcommittee's total allocation.
- The bill proposes to fund the Forest Service at \$5.2 billion with funding for State & Private Forestry at \$198.71 million, Forest & Rangeland Research at \$278.37 million, National Forest System (NFS) at \$1.89 billion, Wildland Fire Management at \$2.51 billion, and Capital Improvement and Maintenance at \$354.73 million.
- The bill proposes to accept the request by the Administration to shift the Forest Service Hazardous Fuels program (\$392.5 million) from Wildland Fire Management to NFS.
- The bill does not accept the President's proposal to zero-out funding for the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, the Forest Legacy Program and the Urban and Community Forestry Program (although the bill would reduce funding to those programs by 2.5, 42, and 2.5 percent respectively).
- The bill provides \$465 million for the Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program.
- The bill provides \$275 million for Land and Water Conservation Fund programs.

The *WFLC Summary of the Forest Service Budget - FY 18* has been updated to include the House Interior bill information. Please note that this table does not include an exhaustive list of Forest Service programs. The table can be found on the WFLC Resources webpage at: <https://www.thewflc.org/resources>.

CWSF staff continue to assist the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) in their FY 2018 appropriations efforts for state forester priority programs. For more information on NASF appropriations priorities please link [here](#).

Farm Bill

In late June, the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry (Ag Committee) held a hearing on *Conservation and Forestry: Perspectives on the Past and Future Direction for the 2018 Farm Bill*. There were 10 witnesses including Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs Deputy Chief Jimmy Bramblett, a tree farmer and owner jointly representing the American Forest Foundation (AFF) and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Director of North America Forest Restoration Chris Topik.

Ag Committee Chairman Pat Roberts' (R-KS) shared in his [opening remarks](#) that a tough budgetary environment exists as the Committee works to craft the next Farm Bill. Furthermore, Congress will have difficult decisions to make. He urged everyone, at the very least, to work to protect conservation and consider working within the confines of the existing programs. Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) [shared comments](#) on the success of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and on the strides made in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill) to provide the Forest Service with new tools to manage national forests. Senator Stabenow also called attention to the importance of continuing to coordinate restoration work across ownership boundaries as forest health challenges don't end at federal property lines.

Chief Tidwell shared in his [testimony](#) that, to date, the agency has entered into 95 Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements in 29 States. He also informed members of the Ag Committee that the 2014 Farm Bill Insect and Disease (I&D) provisions have led to 55.7 million acres of treatment areas designated (between Governors and Regional Forester requests). So far, the Forest Service is using the I&D authorities for 94

projects (across 43 National Forests) in 19 States. A webcast of the hearing along with witness testimonies can be found [here](#).

[NASF recently completed their 2018 Farm Bill Platform](#) comprised of state forester policy recommendations and priorities in the next Farm Bill. CWSF, NASF, the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters, and the Southern Group of State Foresters worked together (beginning late last year) to gather state forester input and ideas for a 2018 Farm Bill platform. After extensive consideration and review, NASF leadership has approved a final platform of recommendations. The NASF 2018 Farm Bill Policy Recommendations can be viewed [here](#) and the formatted NASF Farm Bill handout is [here](#).

Additionally, the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition (FIFB) has [released a set of forest-related recommendations](#) that focus on improving the Farm Bill's ability to support private and family-owned forests and the benefits they provide. The FIFB Coalition has been in existence for more than 15 years and includes more than 85 forest groups representing all aspects of the forest sector. It is co-chaired by AFF, NASF, NWTF, and TNC. CWSF has engaged in the FIFB Coalition throughout the development of coalition recommendations, and assists NASF in representing state foresters' interests. The FIFB Coalition press release and their 2018 Farm Bill recommendations can be found [here](#).

Good Neighbor Authority

This month, Congressman Sean Duffy (R-WI) introduced the [Repair Our Aging Drives Act of 2017 \(ROAD Act of 2017\)](#). The bill (H.R. 3208) amends Section 8206 (GNA) of the 2014 Farm Bill to allow for the construction, reconstruction, repair, or restoration of roads or parking areas as part of GNA. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources (NR Committee) and the House Committee on Agriculture. The bill does not have cosponsors at this time. Congressman Duffy's press release on H.R. 3208 is found [here](#).

Wildfire Funding

In mid-July, Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) introduced the [National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2017](#). The bill (S. 1571) would reauthorize and reform the National Flood Insurance Program that expires at the end of September 2017. Found within Title I, Risk Mitigation, section 102 addresses wildfires on Federal lands. As written, the bill amends the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to allow funding from a Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) subaccount to be transferred to the Forest Service and DOI to pay for wildfire suppression operations when appropriated suppression dollars are exhausted. A Presidential declaration that a major disaster exists for wildfire on federal land is required to access DRF funding.

The annual Interior Appropriations bill would fund 70 percent of the rolling 10-year average for wildfire suppression operations within the Forest Service and DOI base budgets. The remaining 30 percent (of the 10-year average) would be allocated to federal land restoration and resiliency projects or federal land projects and activities to improve the fire regime (both would utilize applicable land and resource management plans or land use plans). In submitting a request for a wildfire disaster declaration to the President, the Secretary (USDA or DOI) shall certify that the 70/30 percentages were made available to the respective agency accordingly. Up to, and not to exceed, \$1.647 billion is available for wildfire suppression operations from the DRF subaccount in a fiscal year. Finally, the section includes a prohibition of other transfers.

The Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs press release on the National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization Act is found [here](#). The section-by-section of the bill is found [here](#).

House Committee on Natural Resources Markup

In late June, the House NR Committee held a full Committee Markup on 22 bills that spanned two days. Included in the markup was consideration of H.R. 2936, [Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017](#), by Congressman Bruce Westerman (R-AR). Two amendments to H.R. 2936 were adopted and the bill, as amended, was favorably reported (23-12) to the House of Representatives. All other 21 bills (some amended) were also favorably reported. A link to the House NR Committee markup webcast is found [here](#). A press release on the Committee passage of H.R. 2936 is [here](#).