



## Legislative & Policy Update – June 2017

Published June 28, 2017

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 includes summaries of recent hearings in the House and the Senate on topics such as fiscal year (FY) 2018 appropriations and federal forest management. Additionally, brief updates are provided on legislation of interest - the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act and the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017 - to CWSF members.

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### Recent Hearings in Congress

Over the last month, there have been multiple hearings held in the House and the Senate on issues of interest to CWSF members. Provided below are summaries of several of those hearings.

### House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

In late May the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Interior Subcommittee) held a budget hearing on the [President's FY 2018 Forest Service budget request](#). The Secretary of Agriculture (Secretary) Sonny Perdue and USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) Chief Tom Tidwell testified at the hearing. Interior Subcommittee members expressed their appreciation to Secretary Perdue for attending the hearing, and Chairman Ken Calvert (R-CA) shared in his opening comments that a USDA Secretary has not testified before the Subcommittee on forestry issues since (at least) the 1960s, based on searching previous records.

Throughout the hearing there were multiple issues brought forth. Ranking Member Betty McCollum (D-MN) conveyed in her opening remarks her concern over the 46 percent proposed reduction to the Forest Service State and Private Forestry (S&PF) program area. She shared that states would be unable to fill the void in funding to S&PF programs that this budget would create if passed. Additionally, Representative Chellie Pingree (D-ME) expressed concern over the low proposed funding to the Forest Stewardship Program and the elimination of the Forest Legacy Program. Secretary Perdue offered positive comments in response,

sharing that the Forest Service has great relationships with states and local forest entities that need to be continued. He indicated that the budget proposal sent a signal to those partners that the Agency doesn't appreciate those relationships. The Secretary shared that this needs to be reviewed and, in some places, restored.

The wildfire funding issue facing the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior (DOI) was mentioned by multiple Interior Subcommittee members. Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum expressed their continued concern - and the concern by the Subcommittee - over the increasing cost of fighting wildfires and the portion of the Forest Service's budget dedicated to wildfire (more than 50 percent in FY 2018 request). Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID), a leader and champion of this issue in the House, questioned whether the Subcommittee should consider ending the Forest Service's transfer authority in order to increase Congress' understanding of the importance of this issue. Secretary Perdue again offered positive comments about wanting to prevail on a wildfire funding fix. He expressed his interest in working with the Interior Subcommittee to identify a way to treat the top one to two percent of wildfires like other natural disasters.

The link to the archived webcast of the budget hearing, along with Secretary Perdue's and Chief Tidwell's witness statements can be found [here](#).

## **Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

In early June, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Interior Subcommittee) held its budget hearing on the President's FY 2018 Forest Service budget request. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell testified at the hearing.

Topics that Senators of the Subcommittee questioned or shared with Chief Tidwell included concerns over inadequate wildland fire funding, the need to increase active management on National Forest System lands, deep reductions to the Forest Service Capital Improvement and Maintenance account, and reductions to recreation. Several Senators pressed Chief Tidwell on the lack of a wildfire funding proposal in the President's budget and expressed their continued interest to identify a solution. Subcommittee Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) shared that the deep reductions to the Capital Improvement and Maintenance program of work run contrary to the priorities the Agency is proposing.

Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Tom Udall (D-MN), and Senator John Hoeven (R-ND) also questioned Chief Tidwell over the Forest Service State Fire Assistance (SFA) Program and the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program and the proposed reductions to them in the President's budget request. Chairwoman Murkowski explained that both programs are critical to Alaska, citing the FY 2015 fires that the State endured. She inquired why the Forest Service isn't proposing larger investments to those accounts. Chief Tidwell responded that the agency is proposing to prioritize work on managing National Forest System lands and that trade-offs had to occur. Additionally, the Chief cited the \$156 million increase to the rolling 10-year average for wildfire suppression and the impacts it has on other agency programs.

The link to Subcommittee hearing webpage, Chairwoman Murkowski's opening statement and Chief Tidwell's testimony is found [here](#).

## Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) met in mid-June to [examine the President's FY 2018 Forest Service budget request](#). This hearing gave Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) - also the Chairwoman for the Senate Interior Subcommittee - a second opportunity to question Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell on the [proposed FY 2018 Budget for the Forest Service](#).

Chairwoman Murkowski and Committee Member Steve Daines (R-MT) expressed their appreciation to the Forest Service for acknowledging in the budget the agency's primary responsibility of managing National Forest System lands. Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) shared that the President's proposed budget would not improve the health of the land. She stated that the status quo for addressing wildfires is insufficient, and the practice of using the rolling 10-year average to budget for wildfire suppression funding hasn't been used by Congress or the President for several years.

In addition to expressing support for improving management on national forests, Senator Daines also stressed the need to continue efforts to improve forest health on family-owned and cross-boundary lands. Senator Daines shared that he and Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) introduced a bill ([S.962 Empowering State Forestry to Improve Forest Health Act of 2017](#)) that would increase partnerships between the Forest Service and State Foresters, including through the use of the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). Chief Tidwell shared positive comments over the success of GNA.

The link to the Senate ENR Committee hearing, Chairwoman Murkowski's opening statement, and Chief Tidwell's testimony can be found [here](#).

## House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands

In mid-June the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands hosted a legislative hearing on the discussion draft [Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017](#).

The discussion draft by Representative Bruce Westerman (R-AR) builds on his previous [Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015 \(H.R.2647\)](#) that passed the House during the 114th Congress. The discussion draft's purpose is "to expedite under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and improve forest management activities on National Forest System lands, on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, and on tribal lands to return resilience to overgrown, fire-prone forested lands, and for other purposes." The discussion draft included language to fix the 2014 Farm Bill GNA roads reconstruction and repair barrier, and wildfire funding language that would address the issue of "fire borrowing".

Witnesses that provided testimony at the hearing included Jim Neiman of Neiman Enterprises, Granger MacDonald of the National Association of Home Builders, Tim Freeman of the Douglas County Board of Commissioners, and Jim Furnish former Deputy Chief of the Forest Service. Three of the four witnesses shared positive comments to the Subcommittee for hosting a hearing on the discussion draft and, more broadly, on the need to increase federal forest management. An archived webcast of the hearing and witness testimonies can be found [here](#).

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) - with assistance from CWSF, the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters, and the Southern Group of State Foresters - submitted a letter to the

Subcommittee outlining NASF's interest in forest management reforms within the discussion draft. NASF also indicated interest in working with Representative Westerman and the committees with jurisdiction over wildfire funding to identify a comprehensive solution that would address fire borrowing and the long-term erosion of funding for non-wildfire suppression programs as a result of increasing firefighting costs.

Following the hearing, Representative Westerman re-introduced the [Resilient Federal Forests Act \(H.R.2936\)](#). The bill would "provide protection to the national forest system by implementing proactive management standards intended to lessen the threat of wildfires and others risks." The bill is co-sponsored by five Republicans and two Democrats. The press release from Representative Westerman's office is found [here](#). CWSF will continue to provide additional updates on this bill.

## **Wildfire Disaster Funding Act Reintroduced**

The [Wildfire Disaster Funding Act \(H.R.2862\)](#) (W DFA) was reintroduced this Congress by Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID) and Representative Kurt Schrader (D-OR) in June 2017. This bill provides a comprehensive solution for wildfire funding that would address both fire transfers (i.e. fire borrowing) and the long-term erosion of other programs and budgets that results from increasing suppression costs. There are 57 co-sponsors to the bill: 24 Republicans and 33 Democrats.

Deviating from previous versions of this bill, the latest W DFA would fund the suppression accounts at the Forest Service and DOI at the 2015 10-year average (i.e. freeze the 10-year average at 2015 levels) and then allow access through a budget cap adjustment for additional fire suppression needs. Representative Simpson and Representative Schrader's press release on the reintroduction of W DFA can be found [here](#). A FAQ on the bill can be found [here](#).

NASF joined other members of the Partner Caucus on Fire Suppression Funding Solutions (Fire Coalition) in applauding the reintroduction of the bipartisan bill. The Fire Coalition's press release, with a quote by NASF President and Wyoming State Forester, Bill Crapser, is found [here](#).