



Legislative & Policy Update – May 2019

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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](#). For more information, please contact Danielle Okst, Associate Policy and Grants Director, dokst@westernforesters.org.

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held a hearing to discuss “Wildfire Resilient Communities” and The Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2019 (Resilient Federal Forests Act) was introduced; both attempt to address the growing threat of fire to our forests and those living in the wildland urban interface. The fiscal year (FY) 2020 appropriations process moved forward as well, with the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Interior) hosting USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) Chief Vicki Christiansen for an examination of the FY 2020 budget request for the agency. Additionally, the House Appropriations Committee introduced their draft FY 2020 Interior Appropriations Bill in mid-May.

House Wildfire Resilient Communities Hearing

Earlier this month, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee held a hearing on “[Wildfire Resilient Communities](#).” This hearing focused on the importance of active forest management, as well as the creation of safer communities through fire resilient home building, land use planning, and ecological and science-based restoration and fuels management. Support was expressed by all members throughout the hearing for the idea that community tools and proactive management go hand-in-hand in a rare moment of bipartisan consensus.

Testimony was provided by [Dr. Ray Rasker](#), Executive Director of Headwaters Economics, [Dr. Stephen Quarles](#), retired Chief Scientist for Wildfire and Durability for the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, [Marko Bey](#), Executive Director of the Lomakatsi Restoration Project, and [Brian Veerkamp](#), County Supervisor for El Dorado County, California. Dr. Rasker pointed to the need within communities for help with land use planning and access to hazard maps as well as the value of connecting fire departments with planners to share expertise, outreach, and enforce fire safe regulations. Mr. Veerkamp brought his perspective from 31 years in the fire and emergency services field and subsequent public service to the discussion, pointing to the use of ordinances mandating residents to manage the vegetation surrounding their homes or it being managed for them at their expense. He also spoke to the power of coalitions in implementing solutions but implored that Congress provide greater support so that efforts can be proactive instead of reactive.

[Patti Hiramji](#), Acting Deputy Chief of State and Private Forestry of the Forest Service, also testified. She noted that “states are uniquely positioned to convene stakeholders to work together and prioritize investments to address these [wildfire] risks,” emphasizing the importance of states in partner engagement for Shared Stewardship. Due to local or state agencies being the first to respond to approximately 75 percent of fires nationally, she highlighted the critical role of State Foresters in working with the Forest Service to identify at-risk communities and build capacity.

Resilient Federal Forests Act

During the House hearing, Representative John Curtis (R-UT) referenced the reintroduction of the [Resilient Federal Forests Act](#) as these proactive management ideals in practice. [Representative Bruce Westerman](#) (R-AR) introduced this legislation as an update of the [Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017](#), which passed in the House during the 115th Congress but failed to progress in the Senate. It contains provisions for expedited environmental analysis and availability of categorical exclusions to expedite forest management activities, accelerated salvage and reforestation activities following catastrophic events, a pilot program for use of arbitration in lieu of litigation for challenges to forest management activities, and quickened interagency consultation.

FY 2020 Appropriations

Senate Forest Service Budget Request Hearing

The Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee held a [hearing on the FY 2020 budget request for the Forest Service](#). Chief Christiansen fielded [questions from Subcommittee Chairman Lisa Murkowski \(R-AK\)](#) on the proposed funding levels for State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA), directly citing statistics provided by the National Association of State Foresters. During the exchange, Chairman Murkowski stated that regardless of state or federal ownership, state and local agencies were first responders on fires 78 percent of the time in 2018. She went on to point out SFA and VFA funds supported training over 119,000 fire fighters last year and lowered overall federal suppression costs, creating a great deal of impact through a relatively small amount of funding. Despite the value of these funds, the FY 2020 budget proposal calls for a cut of almost \$6 million for VFA and over \$15 million for SFA. Chief Christiansen emphasized the Forest Service is still investing funds in order to leverage these critical partnerships with state and local authorities and are willing to work with the Subcommittee on this, but were instructed by the Administration to cut five percent from the FY 2019 request leading to some tough choices. The dialogue concluded with Chairman Murkowski reiterating the strong feelings both she and Ranking Member Tom Udall (D-NM) have on SFA and VFA not being the target of these reductions and recognizing the contribution of these first responders to both the fight against wildfire threats and to rural economies.

House Draft FY 2020 Interior Appropriations Bill

The House Appropriations Committee [released](#) the [draft FY 2020 Interior Appropriations Bill](#) on May 14, which was subsequently [considered and accepted](#) by the Subcommittee on Interior. The Committee also released the accompanying [report](#) that provides additional detail to the Interior Appropriations Bill in advance of the full Committee markup.

The Forest Service's budget reform recommendations are reflected in the draft with the elimination of cost pools. All 'programmatic increases' represent the funding increase after accounting for the cost pool adjustments. Instead of the former practice of using cost pools, the indirect costs will now be reflected within the newly created Forest Service Operations Account. The Committee recommends a total of \$921.85 million for this account. The draft allocates a total of \$382.89 million dollars for State and Private Forestry (S&PF). After those adjustments, the draft allocation is a programmatic increase for S&PF of \$66.45 million over the FY 2019 enacted level and \$216.09 million over the FY 2020 Administration request. Additionally,

- Landscape Scale Restoration is provided \$20 million, an increase of \$6 million from FY 2019 and \$20 million above the budget request;
- SFA sees a programmatic increase of \$4 million with a recommendation of \$83.12 million, \$17.19 million above the request;
- VFA sees a \$2 million programmatic increase from the previous year to \$19 million, \$6 million above the requested amount;
- The Forest Stewardship Program receives a recommendation of \$25 million, a programmatic increase of \$6.40 million above FY 2019 and a \$7.14 million increase from the budget request;
- The Forest Legacy Program was not zeroed out per the budget request, but is recommended to be funded at \$75 million, an \$11.96 million increase from FY 2019; and
- The Committee rejected the request to eliminate Urban and Community Forestry, instead recommending \$40 million, a programmatic increase of \$12.40 million above FY 2019.

National Forest System is recommended at \$1.6 billion, a programmatic increase of \$101.66 million over FY 2019 and \$91.47 million over the budget request. The Committee recommendation for hazardous fuels is \$390.17 million which is a \$26.80 million programmatic increase above the enacted level and \$8.91 million above the budget request. The recommendation for Forest and Rangeland Research is \$277.16 million, a programmatic increase of \$16 million over the enacted level and \$59.93 above the requested amount. Forest Inventory and Analysis is recommended at \$73.17, increasing \$6 million from FY 2019.

The Committee recommends Wildland Fire Management receive \$2.01 billion. After accounting for the cost pool elimination and including the cap adjustment fire suppression fund this is a programmatic increase of \$1.30 billion over FY 2019 and \$16.62 million higher than the Administration's request. Suppression operations is recommended at the FY 2015 rolling 10-year average per the wildfire funding fix, at a level of \$1.011 billion. If available suppression funding is exhausted, the Committee has provided an additional \$1.95 billion in fire cap funding.