



Legislative & Policy Update – May 2021

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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.

In response to [Executive Order \(EO\) Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#) directing federal agencies to coordinate a government-wide approach to combat the climate crisis, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack delivered a report detailing recommendations for a climate-smart agriculture and forestry strategy. A 90-day progress report on this strategy was released this month. In congressional news, the National Prescribed Fire Act of 2021 was introduced in both chambers on May 20.

USDA Report on Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry

The EO directed the Secretary to consider practices “that decrease wildfire risk fueled by climate change, source sustainable bioproducts and fuels, and result in conservation actions that provide measurable carbon reductions and sequestration.” To work towards developing this climate-smart strategy, a [Federal Register Notice](#) requesting input was published by USDA to compile stakeholder input. Over 2,700 comments were received, including comments from [CWSF in collaboration with the National Association of State Foresters Policy Team](#).

Recommendations within the [90-day progress report](#) include, developing a forest and wildfire resilience strategy and strengthening education, training, and technical assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices. The report highlights the need to increase the rate of fuels reduction to decrease the risk of severe wildfire, including increasing the scale of current USDA actions by two to four times what is currently being treated. According to this modeling, it is necessary to treat an additional 20 million acres on National Forest System land and 30 million acres on other federal, state, Tribal, and private lands, particularly in the West to significantly reduce the risk of these high intensity wildfires in the coming years. [Shared Stewardship](#) is pointed to as a collaborative approach that could help partners work towards these goals across landscapes.

The National Prescribed Fire Act of 2021

Legislation aimed at increasing the use of prescribed fire was reintroduced this month. The National Prescribed Fire Act of 2021 was introduced by [Representatives Kim Schrier \(D-WA\)](#), Mike Simpson (R-ID), Kurt Schrader (D-OR) in the House and [Senators Ron Wyden \(D-OR\)](#), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) in the Senate. The bipartisan bill would:

- Create \$300 million accounts for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and Department of the Interior (DOI) to plan, prepare, and conduct controlled burns on federal, state, and private lands;
- Establish a \$10 million collaborative program, modeled off of the [Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program](#), to implement controlled burns on high wildfire risk county, state, and private lands;
- Create an incentive program for large-scale controlled burns by state, county, and federal agencies;
- Establish a workforce development program at the Forest Service and DOI for prescribed fire practitioners; and
- Require state air quality agencies to allow larger controlled burns and increase the flexibility to conduct burns in the winter months.

View State Forester support for the National Prescribed Fire Act of 2021 [here](#).