



Legislative & Policy Update – January 2024

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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 [Neil Simpson](#), Director of Policy.

This month's policy update from Neil Simpson, CWSF/WFLC Director of Policy, details the latest on fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations and previews the uptick in forestry and wildfire issues in Washington, D.C., including flexible funding for Forest Action Plans, hazardous fuels funding, reforestation, and the Good Neighbor Authority.

Appropriations and Continuing Resolutions

House and Senate leaders have reached a framework agreement that outlines top-line spending levels of \$886.3 billion for defense and \$772.7 in nondefense spending. The agreement is generally in line with the debt limit spending deal previously agreed to by President Biden and former Speaker McCarthy. The House Freedom Caucus continues to demand deeper cuts and policy riders as part of any appropriations package, but the agreement is recognized as a critical step in appropriating funds for FY 2024 and has generally been accepted by leaders and members of both parties.

While an agreement was reached on top-line spending levels, it did not leave enough time for appropriators to finish the work on the twelve separate bills that fund the federal government, and Congress has passed a continuing resolution (CR) to keep the government funded into early March. The CR was passed by the Senate and House on January 18 and signed into law by President Biden on January 19. This is the third such CR since FY 2023 ended on September 30, 2023. It utilizes the same two-tiered approach as the previous CR which had an expiration date of January 19 for certain priority programs and February 2 for most programs, including the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and others funded by the Department of Interior and Related Agencies funding. The new CR extends those deadlines to March 1, 2024, and March 8, 2024, respectively.

Although final appropriations are still being debated, we can look to the previously passed House [Department of Interior and Related Appropriations Bill HR 4821](#), and the [Report from Senate Committee on Appropriations](#) for an indication of funding levels we can expect to see for Forest Service Programs. Funding highlights from those bills can be found in the [August 2023 Policy Update](#).

Legislative Update:

While Congress is currently focused on appropriations, interest in forestry and wildfire issues remains high in Washington, D.C. Over 100 bills have been introduced on forestry topics ranging from agroforestry to wildfires. It is unlikely most of these bills will ever become law, but several bills remain relevant and important to State Foresters and federal land managers. In 2024, we may see these bills move forward as stand-alone pieces of legislation or become incorporated into other bills, such as the Farm Bill. A few of the highest priority bills, which CWSF is closely monitoring, are highlighted below.

Flexible Funding for Forest Action Plans

Representative Andrea Salinas (D-OR) has introduced a bill to provide flexible funding for Forest Action Plans. [HR 5157](#) was introduced in August 2023 and is co-sponsored by Representative Joe Neguse (D-CO). The bill would “amend the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 to authorize and expand State-wide assessments and strategies for forest resources,” commonly referred to as Forest Action Plans. Existing authorizations in the act are currently focused on supporting the development and updating Forest Action Plans. While the bill does not appropriate any funds, it increases the authorization from \$10 to \$40 million per year and adds an additional authorization of up to \$40 million per year for the purpose of implementing, rather than developing, Forest Action Plans.

The bill is currently in the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry.

Hazardous Fuels and Wildfire Defense Grant Funding

Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR), along with three co-sponsors, has introduced [S 2749 the Wildfire Resilient Communities Act](#). In the House Representatives, Val Hoyle (D-OR) and six co-sponsors have introduced [HR 6525](#) under the same name.

The bills would:

- authorize a transfer from the Treasury of \$30 billion dollars, to be available until expended, for hazardous fuels reduction activities on federal lands managed by the U.S. Department of Interior National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Forest Service.
- authorize \$3 billion in appropriations for the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program (CWDG). CWDG is currently funded until 2026 by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and funding authorizations in this bill would begin in FY2027. Learn more about the CWDG program on CWSF’s [CWDG webpage](#).
- permanently re-authorize the Collaborative Landscape Restoration Program, along with an increase in authorizations of appropriations from \$80 million per year to \$100 million per year.
- create a County Stewardship Fund, which would require 25% of receipts collected from Stewardship End Result Contracts to be distributed to the county(s) in which the contract took place.

S 2749 is currently in the Senate Agriculture Nutrition and Forestry Committee, and HR 6525 is currently in both the House Agriculture Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee.

Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources

Representative Kim Schrier (D-WA) has introduced a bill to provide grants and other assistance for nurseries and seed orchards. [HR 5381](#), the Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources Support Act, or RNGR, would codify, enhance, and authorize appropriations for the Forest Service's [RNGR Program](#). The comprehensive bill directs the Chief of the Forest Service to partner with states, tribes, and private nurseries and collaborate with other federal agencies on many items designed to enhance reforestation supply chains and nursery infrastructure and operations.

The bill authorizes \$25 million per year for FYs 2024 through 2028 to carry out the above provisions and to create a grant program to develop, enhance, and improve nursery production. The grant program would be available to State Forestry Agencies, Indian Tribes, and private nurseries with experience growing native plants for reforestation, restoration, and conservation.

The bill is currently in the Forestry Subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee.

Good Neighbor Authority

The CR of November 2023 extended the 2018 Farm Bill, including states' ability to retain revenue under the Good Neighbor Authority, until September 30, 2024. With the Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act, both the House and Senate seek to lengthen that extension until 2028 and expand the ability to retain revenue for use on authorized restoration activities to include tribes and counties.

The House of Representatives has passed [HR 1450](#), sponsored by Russ Fulcher (R-ID) along with nine co-sponsors. In the Senate, James Risch (R-ID) has introduced [S 697](#) with four co-sponsors, and the bill currently is with the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee.

Find more information about the Good Neighbor Authority on the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition's [Good Neighbor Authority Webpage](#).