



**CWSF**  
COUNCIL OF WESTERN  
STATE FORESTERS

## Legislative & Policy Update – December 2024

Published December 18, 2024

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](#). 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, which provides 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](#), CWSF/WFLC Director of Policy.

This month's policy update covers:

- Continuing Resolution, Disaster Relief Funding, and Farm Bill Extension
- House Democrats Committee Leadership Positions
- Western Governors' Association Air Quality Resolution
- Federal Disaster Tax Relief Act
- Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Wildfire and Forestry Bills
- Bill to Make the Chief of the USDA Forest Service a Presidential Appointment
- Monarch Butterfly Threatened Species Listing Proposed
- \$335 Million in Grants to Support Private Forestland Management and Conservation

### Continuing Resolution, Disaster Relief Funding, and Farm Bill Extension

Update 12/19/2024 10:23 a.m. MT

The continuing resolution (CR) negotiated by Speaker Johnson and House Democrats looks unlikely to move forward after President-elect Trump and others spoke out against it on Wednesday. Trump is insisting on cuts to a range of spending proposals included in the text released on Tuesday and that the package includes raising the debt ceiling. In a statement on X, Trump and Vice-President-elect JD Vance stated, "Republicans want to support our farmers, pay for disaster relief, and set our country up for success in 2025."

[Politico reports](#) closed-door talks between Johnson and Trump's team are ongoing. This is a rapidly changing situation, which we will continue to monitor.

-----  
The House Appropriations Committee has released a final legislative package containing a continuing resolution (CR), disaster relief funding, and a Farm Bill extension.

H.R. 10445, the Continuing Appropriations and Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2025, extends government funding until March 14, 2025, and the 2018 Farm Bill until September 30, 2025. The

Farm Bill extension includes the ability of states to retain revenues under the Good Neighbor Authority. The bill also contains \$110 billion in wide-ranging disaster assistance, such as rebuilding the Francis Scott Key Bridge, economic aid to farmers, and relief for Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

The bill appropriates \$29.0 billion for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, \$356.5 million for the USDA Farm Service Agency's Emergency Forest Restoration Program, and funding for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service). Forest Service funding is available until expended for necessary expenses related to hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters in calendar years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

Specific Forest Service allocations include:

- \$68.1 million for Forest Service Operations
- \$26.0 million for Forest and Rangeland Research
- \$208.0 million for State, Private, and Tribal Forestry
- \$2.523 billion for the National Forest System
- \$3.525 billion for Capital Improvement and Maintenance

The 1,500-page bill includes a variety of unrelated add-ons, such as transferring jurisdiction of RFK Memorial Stadium from the Department of Interior to the District of Columbia. However, lawmakers failed to reach an agreement in time to include a permitting reform package or a natural resources and public lands package.

The House and Senate are expected to pass the bill before the current CR expires on Friday, December 20.

[Read the Press Release](#)

### **House Democrats Solidify Committee Leadership Positions**

In a December 17 Democratic Caucus meeting, Democrats voted for Representative Angie Craig (D-MN) as the Democrat's top-ranking member on the House Agriculture Committee. Craig supplants current ranking member David Scott (D-GA) and the second-ranking Democrat Jim Costa (D-CA). Scott has been the top Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee since 2021, but health troubles have led some to question his ability to face off against conservatives vowing to slash programs.

Democrats also voted for Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA) to succeed Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), who is stepping down as the top Democrat on the House Natural Resources Committee due to health issues. On December 16, Huffman won the Democratic Steering Committee's vote over Representative Melanie Stansbury (D-NM), who was endorsed by Grijalva. Huffman secured the assignment by a unanimous vote of the Democratic Caucus.

### **Western Governors' Approve Policy Resolution Supporting Prescribed Fire**

At the recent Western Governors' Association [Winter Meeting](#) held in Las Vegas, Nevada, Western Governors approved five policy resolutions focused on air quality, compensatory mitigation, energy, health care, and workforce development. The air quality resolution recognizes wildfires' impact on air quality and expresses support for increased use of prescribed fire to reduce the air quality effects of uncharacteristic wildfires. It encourages greater state-federal collaboration on smoke management and specifically states there should be "simplified exceptional events guidance for prescribed fire."

[Read and download the resolution.](#)

## Federal Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2023 Signed into Law

President Biden has signed [H.R. 5863](#), the Federal Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2023, sponsored by Representative Gregory Steube (R-FL) and co-sponsored by 19 Republicans and 16 Democrats from across the country.

The law excludes qualified wildfire relief payments received by individuals between December 31, 2019, and January 1, 2026, from the IRS definition of gross income.

## Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Advances Fire and Forestry Bills

On November 19, the [Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources](#) held a business meeting to consider over 70 bills related to wildfire, forestry, public lands, and other natural resources issues. The Committee marked up the bills and ultimately passed them out of Committee, recommending they be passed by the full Senate. Lawmakers sought to include these bills as part of a natural resources and public lands package in the CR. That package was not included, leaving only a slight chance for any of these bills to pass before the 118th Congress ends on December 20, 2024.

- [S. 2132 - Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act of 2023](#)
- [S. 2151 - Utah Wildfire Research Institute Act of 2023](#)
- [S. 2867 - Promoting Effective Forest Management Act of 2023](#)
- [S. 4424 - National Prescribed Fire Act of 2024](#)

## Bill Introduced to Make the Chief of the USDA Forest Service a Presidential Appointment

Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), the [incoming Chair](#) of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, has introduced S. 5440, which directs the President to appoint the Chief of the Forest Service with the advice and consent of the Senate. With the 118th Congress ending on December 20, 2024, there is no path for Congress to pass this in the remainder of the 118th Congress, but it is a signal of things to come from the Senate Committee on Natural Resources under Lee's leadership. [Senator Lee's one-pager](#) states the "legislation recognizes the need for updated oversight" of the Forest Service.

## Monarch Butterfly Threatened Species Listing Proposed

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to list the monarch butterfly as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and designate 4,395 acres of critical habitat in coastal California.

[Further information from USFWS](#)

[Link to Federal Register](#)

## \$335 Million in Grants to Support Private Forestland Management and Conservation

The USDA [announced](#) awards of \$335 million to strengthen financial incentives for private forest landowners to manage and conserve private forests. With funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act, \$210 million will be used to enhance active forest management, and \$125 million will be used to conserve 105,000 acres under the Forest Legacy Program.

The \$210 million was awarded as competitive grants to state agencies and other organizations to connect small acreage landowners with emerging markets and provide state-endorsed cost-share programs for landowners to adopt sustainable forest management practices.

[Information on Forest Landowner Support Funded Projects](#)

[Information on Forest Legacy Projects](#)