



CWSF
COUNCIL OF WESTERN
STATE FORESTERS

Legislative & Policy Update – April 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.

Following the release of the President's fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget proposal and subsequent detailed justification last month, Congress has held multiple hearings to discuss priority areas in the Administration's proposed funding levels for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service). The debate over the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief, 2019 Act (Disaster Supplemental) is still ongoing, with multiple attempts to move forward with the legislation failing before both Chambers began a two-week recess.

Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies: "U.S. Forest Service FY 2020 Budget Hearing"

The House Appropriations Subcommittee held a [hearing](#) with Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen regarding the FY 2020 budget proposal. Members of the Subcommittee expressed they are looking forward to funding the federal wildfire funding fix in this year's appropriations process to end fire transfers. Subcommittee Chairman (Chair) Betty McCollum (D-MN) indicated the budget request does not properly prioritize forest health and the prevention of wildfires, particularly emphasizing the 46% decrease in State and Private Forestry, 15 eliminated programs, and 16% reduction in overall Forest Service funding.

Chief Christiansen cited the Forest Service's efforts to reach a 20 year high in forest treatment, including 3.2 billion board feet of timber and 3.4 million treated acres. She communicated the growing preference of using the Shared Stewardship initiative to look at collective landscapes for the Agency's work, and the desire to build on the momentum of the memorandum of understanding with the Western Governors' Association and agreement with Idaho. The Forest Service has executed nearly 200 Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements in 37 states, and she indicated the need to continue large-scale work across jurisdictional boundaries. Implementing the 2018 Farm Bill GNA amendment to include counties and tribes is underway, with template agreements created and discussions with those parties about their local needs in progress.

Subcommittee Chair McCollum and Ranking Member Dave Joyce (R-OH) both expressed concerns about the Forest Service's ability to combat the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in light of such large budget cuts. Chief Christiansen pointed to prioritization of funds for urgent pests, identifying EAB as one of the most pressing

threats facing the country. She also referenced research to develop resistant species of Ash as a long-term solution.

Later in the hearing, Representative (Rep.) Chellie Pingree (D-ME) mentioned the progress in Maine on using energy alternatives like biomass instead of oil as a heat source, referencing the Timber Innovation Act passed within the [The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, H.R. 2](#) (2018 Farm Bill). Chief Christiansen noted the 2018 Farm Bill elevated the Wood Innovation Grant by codifying this program, which began in 2015 and takes a small portion of hazardous fuel management funding for the purpose of creating incentives to increase the use of biomass from National Forest System and other forest lands.

Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands: “Examining the Spending Priorities and Missions of the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management”

The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands held an oversight [hearing](#) on “Examining the Spending Priorities and Missions of the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management”. Chair Deb Haaland (D-NM) expressed frustration with the Administration espousing support of Shared Stewardship yet providing a FY 2020 proposal cutting technical assistance programs that support and allow collaboration. Chief Christiansen informed the Committee that the fire funding fix would stabilize the Agency’s operating environment, though some members were disappointed the non-fire accounts previously negatively impacted by fire transfers did not appear to be a priority within this budget proposal. Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) stated the request for deep cuts to State and Private Forestry represent a disconnect between the rhetoric around Shared Stewardship and the programs that actually make it happen.

Energy and Natural Resources Committee: “Full Committee Hearing to Examine the President's FY 2020 Budget Request for the USDA Forest Service”

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a [hearing](#) to examine the President’s budget request for the Forest Service for FY 2020. [Chair Lisa Murkowski \(R-AK\)](#) noted she looks forward to seeing the stabilization of non-fire programs with the implementation of the federal fire funding fix in FY 2020, but indicated concern that the budget proposal does not invest enough in forest management to reduce wildfire risks. Chair Murkowski commended cross-boundary work and shared decision-making, emphasizing the critical role of state and local partners in forest health.

Multiple members focused their questions on the impending fire season, with [Senator Maria Cantwell \(D-WA\)](#) pointing to the [National Interagency Fire Center’s Wildland Fire Potential Outlook](#) predicting another unusually early and high risk season for Washington. Chief Christiansen responded that while this budget followed the Administration’s instruction to reduce 5% from the FY 2019 request, forest treatment and hazardous fuels were the highest priorities. She assured the Committee the Agency will use whatever resources Congress provides to invest in the most critical places with the highest risk and pointed to the work to be completed under the forthcoming Shared Stewardship Agreement with Washington State.

Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies: “Review of the FY2020 Budget Request for USDA”

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee held a [hearing](#) reviewing the FY 2020 USDA budget request. Ranking Member Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) noted the request looks very similar to the FY 2019 proposal

and in his opinion does not reflect the important mission USDA has in prioritizing rural communities to keep Americans' way of life. He also mentioned his constituents affected by natural disasters and his desire to see the pending disaster supplemental pass. USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue made mention of how returning to the normal order of the appropriations process would help the budget comparisons, as the FY 2019 budget was not enacted until after they had begun to put this FY 2020 proposal together. He also conveyed to the Subcommittee his hope they could reconcile their differences quickly for the sake of those impacted by those disasters across the country, from the fires in the west to the flooding in the midwest and hurricanes in the south.

Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief, 2019 Act

The Disaster Supplemental ([H.R. 268](#)) passed the House in January, but the [amended version](#) in the Senate failed multiple procedural votes to end debate and move forward at the beginning of this month. The [amended Senate version](#) allocates \$13.45 billion dollars in additional funds to states and territories impacted by tornadoes, flooding, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, volcanoes, typhoons, and other natural disasters. Within this version, \$3.01 billion (up from \$1.11 billion in H.R. 268) is provided to the USDA Office of the Secretary for crop, tree, bush, and vine loss from these natural disasters.

The final week in session prior to a two-week recess, [House Appropriations Committee Chair Nita M. Lowey \(D-NY\) introduced](#) another disaster relief bill, [H.R. 2157](#), expanding upon H.R. 268. H.R. 2157 adds \$3 billion in funding to address flooding in the Midwest and tornadoes in the South, bringing the full total of supplemental disaster appropriations within the bill to \$17.2 billion. [Senate minority members](#) introduced a [companion bill](#) in the Senate matching the House bill's figures. All versions of these disaster bills include \$720.3 million for Forest Service's Wildland Fire Management to replenish appropriations accounts impacted by fire transfers in 2018. Negotiations have been ongoing between the Senate [majority](#) and [minority](#) over funding levels for Puerto Rico, with the [White House taking a position opposing](#) additional funding for the island.