



Legislative & Policy Update – April 2025

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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](#). 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:

- Fix Our Forests Act Introduced in the Senate
- Aerial Firefighting Enhancement Act Passes the Senate
- Forest Legacy Program Changes Introduced in the House of Representatives
- USDA Announces Reforms to Increase Active Management on National Forests
- FEMA Ends the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant Program

Fix Our Forests Act Introduced in the Senate

Initially introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Westerman (R-AR), [H.R. 471](#) passed the House in January by a roll call vote of 279-141. In the Senate, Curtis (R-UT), Hickenlooper (D-CO), Sheehy (R-MT), and Padilla (D-CA) have introduced a version containing several changes. Generally, the bill seeks to increase fuel reduction and forest health treatments on National Forest System lands, reduce wildfire risk within communities, and address reforestation needs.

The House version of the bill would:

- Designate Fireshed Management Areas (sec. 101) and directs the use of streamlined authorities to carry out fuels and fire management projects within the fireshed.
- Establish a Fireshed Center (sec. 102) comprised of 14 federal agencies and housed jointly within the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and U.S. Geological Survey.
- Establish the Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program (sec. 201), comprised of eight federal agencies. The program aims to advance research and science, support local adoption of code and standards, support local efforts to address wildfire impacts, including property damage, air and water quality, encourage public-private partnerships for fuel reduction, and provide technical and financial assistance to communities.
- Expand the Joint Fire Science Program (sec. 202) to advance research on innovative designs to create or improve wildfire-resistant structures and communities.
- Include provisions from the [Fire Safe Electrical Corridors Act](#) (sec. 309) and the [Fire Department Repayment Act](#) (sec. 207).

In addition to what is in the House version, the Senate version would:

- Expand the Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program, with more emphasis on program structure, accountability, and the built environment (sec. 201)

- Add home hardening as an eligible activity under the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program (sec. 204).
- Name the Fireshed Center the Wildfire Intelligence Center and expand its duties (sec. 102).
- Add provisions relating to prescribed fire, including increased accessibility of training and assignments for non-federal burners (Title I, Subtitle D).

View the [Senate press release with bill text and summary](#).

Aerial Firefighting Enhancement Act Passes the Senate

[S. 160](#), introduced by Senator Sheehy (R-MT) and cosponsored by four others, would amend the [Wildfire Suppression Aircraft Transfer Act](#), which expired on September 30, 2000. The bill would reauthorize, until 2035, the sale by the Department of Defense of aircraft and parts to the private sector if they are used to deliver fire retardant on a wildfire incident. The bill would add water delivery as an acceptable use of the aircraft and remove the prohibition that the aircraft may not leave the United States unless dispatched through the National Interagency Fire Center and approved in advance and in writing by the Secretaries of Defense and Agriculture.

In the House of Representatives, an identical bill, [H.R. 956](#), has been introduced and assigned to the Committee on Agriculture’s Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture. The Senate version is “being held at the desk,” meaning it could go directly to the floor for consideration.

Forest Legacy Program Changes Introduced in the House of Representatives

Representatives Garamendi (D-CA) and Calvert (R-CA) reintroduced the “[Forest Legacy Management Flexibility Act](#).” Representatives Costa (D-CA), Harder (D-CA), Mullin (D-CA), Bonamici (D-OR), and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) have also cosponsored the bill, which has been referred to the House Committee on Agriculture.

It would allow states to designate accredited, nonprofit land trusts to hold conservation easements purchased through the Forest Legacy Program. Current law authorizing the Forest Service [Forest Legacy Program](#) requires that only federal or state governments hold conservation easements purchased under the Forest Legacy Program.

View the [press release](#).

USDA Announces Reforms to Increase Active Management on National Forests

USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins announced an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) on 112,646,000 acres of National Forest System Land. The ESD will allow the Forest Service to forgo the predecisional objection process and allow implementation immediately after notification of a Finding of No Significant Impact for an Environmental Analysis or when the public notice requirements are met for Environmental Impact Statement Records of Decision.

In the April 4, 2025 [press release](#), Secretary Rollins states, “I am proud to follow the bold leadership of President Trump by empowering forest managers to reduce constraints and minimize the risks of fire, insects, and disease so that we can strengthen American timber industry and further enrich our forests with the resources they need to thrive.” A [memo](#) from Forest Service Acting Associate Chief Chris French is linked in the press release. It outlines specific actions the Forest Service will take to increase active forest management to seek the following goals:

- Support rural economies and forest product industry partners.

- Reduce the risk of destructive wildfire by creating and sustaining healthy and resilient forests and watersheds.
- Build capacity through workforce alignment and partnerships.

The memo directs the Deputy Chiefs of the National Forest System and State, Private, and Tribal Forestry to integrate the teams and funding structures at the Washington Office and Regional Foresters to develop a strategy for field-level integration. It also directs Regional Foresters to develop five-year strategies to increase timber output by 25% over the next 4-5 years. Generally, it seeks to streamline certification requirements and processes and enhance coordination with states, tribes, counties, and other partners to increase active management.

FEMA Ends the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant Program

In a [press release](#) on April 4, 2025, FEMA announced they are ending the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Grant Program and canceling applications from fiscal years 2020-2023. “If grant funds have not been distributed to states, tribes, territories and local communities, funds will be immediately returned either to the Disaster Relief Fund or the U.S. Treasury.”

The [Association of State Floodplain Managers](#) has written about the cancellation, and an April 16 [advisory](#) issued by FEMA provides more details. The advisory states:

- Recipients will be able to complete fully obligated projects that have begun construction.
- Fully obligated projects that have not been started will not be approved.
- Phased projects may be canceled at the end of Phase 1 or at another appropriate stopping point.