



CWSF
COUNCIL OF WESTERN
STATE FORESTERS

Legislative & Policy Update – April 2026

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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:

- Forest Service Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request
- BLM Proposes 5,000 Acre Thinning and Salvage Harvest Categorical Exclusions
- OPM Proposes Hazard Pay for Prescribed Fire
- Legislation to Reauthorize FirstNet Passes the House
- Exceptional Events Legislation to be Voted on in the House
- Legislation Introduced to Allow the Transfer of Federal Aircraft to States
- Farm Bill Update

Forest Service Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Request

President Trump released his Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) [Budget Request](#), along with [appendices](#) for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). This was followed by the USDA [Forest Service](#) (Forest Service) and [DOI](#) Budget Justifications.

The President's budget request states it "restores federalism by empowering States to assume a greater role in managing forest lands within their borders." The Forest Service Budget Justification proposes to eliminate funding for State, Private, and Tribal Forestry and for Forest and Rangeland Research. It also continues the proposal to transfer all wildfire funding to the newly created DOI U.S. Wildland Fire Service.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) noted in a statement about the President's Budget Request that "While the Administration proposes a budget, Congress holds the power of the purse. The Senate Appropriations Committee will now hold hearings with cabinet members and agency heads to review these recommendations and to explore other fiscally responsible proposals." Both the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Committees have begun budget hearings and markups, which you can watch at the links below.

- Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz testified on [April 16, 2026](#), at a House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee. The subcommittee heard testimony from Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum on [April 20, 2026](#).
- The Senate Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee has a budget hearing scheduled at [10:00 a.m. \(ET\) on April 22, 2026](#).

- The House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee has a markup scheduled at [8:00 a.m. \(ET\) on May 21, 2026](#).
- The House Appropriations Committee has a markup scheduled at [10:00 a.m. \(ET\) June 3, 2026](#).

In his testimony, Chief Schultz stated the FY27 budget focuses on active forest management, critical minerals and energy development, and efficient and effective fire management. He received numerous questions, including ones on Forest Service reorganization, fire unification, the new USDA grant and agreement Terms and Conditions, and zeroing out budgets for State, Private, and Tribal Forestry and Forest and Rangeland Research. Ranking member Chellie Pingree (D-ME) commented that appropriators should be concerned about large cuts proposed across numerous federal FY27 budgets and that states do not have the resources to absorb the cuts.

CWSF will provide more information when the House and Senate settle on their recommended funding levels.

BLM Proposes 5,000 Acre Thinning and Salvage Harvest Categorical Exclusions

On April 6, 2026, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) listed two proposals to revise the Agency's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures. One would add a new Categorical Exclusion (CE) for up to 5,000 acres of "forest and woodland density management," otherwise known as thinning. The other would establish a CE for salvage harvest of areas up to 5,000 acres.

In the Federal Register Notice, the BLM notes that 5,000 acres is 1/116th of 1 percent of the 58 million forested acres it manages. It also references the more than 1,800 Environmental Analyses with a Finding of No Significant Impact as evidence that thinning does not normally have a significant impact and therefore warrants the CE.

The Federal Register Notice for the Salvage CE notes that there are approximately 2 million acres of dead and dying timber on BLM-managed lands, and that wildfires burn, on average, 236,530 acres of BLM-managed land per year. It also states, as justification for the CE, that between 1986 and 2024, the BLM analyzed 982 salvage timber sales and approved all of them with a Finding of No Significant Impact, thus showing that salvage sales routinely have no significant impact and warrant a CE.

- View the Forest [Thinning CE Federal Register Notice](#)
- View the [Salvage CE Federal Register Notice](#)

Comments are due May 6, 2026. Instructions to submit comments are in the Federal Register Notices.

OPM Proposes Hazard Pay for Prescribed Fire

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is proposing to authorize a 25 percent Hazardous Duty Pay Differential for DOI and Forest Service employees performing prescribed fire duties. The proposed change recognizes that employees face similar hazards and long-term health risks when working on prescribed fires as when working on wildfires.

Comments are due June 25, 2026. Read the proposed rule and submit comments on [Regulations.gov](#).

Legislation to Reauthorize FirstNet Passes the House

On April 20, 2026, the House of Representatives unanimously passed H.R. 7386, the [First Responder Network \(FirstNet\) Reauthorization Act](#). FirstNet was authorized in 2012 to address communication failures identified by the 9/11 Commission. It is used by law enforcement, fire, EMS, and emergency managers for reliable, secure communication during emergencies and disaster response. The statutory authority for FirstNet expires on February 22, 2027. The bill would authorize it until September 30, 2037, and place the authority under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.

Exceptional Events Legislation To be Voted on in the House

H.R. 6387, the [Fire Improvement and Reforming Exceptional Events Act](#), has been placed on the House calendar for a floor vote. Sponsored by Congressman Gabe Evans (R-CO) and co-sponsored by Congressmen Adam Gray (D-CA), Paul Gosar (R-AZ), and Jeff Crank (R-CO), the bill would update the definition of an exceptional event in the Clean Air Act to include “human activity that is intended to mirror the occurrence or recurrence of a natural event,” and create a new category of exceptional events that specifically includes prescribed burns.

According to a [press release](#) from Evans' office, the bill “works to provide clarity and predictability for air quality planning, reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens on manufacturers and communities, and reward proactive wildfire mitigation that protects public health and improves air quality for future generations.”

A floor vote is expected on April 22, 2026.

Legislation Introduced to Allow the Transfer of Federal Aircraft to States

Senator Tim Sheehy (R-MT) has introduced legislation that would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to transfer title to certain aircraft and related parts that are currently only loaned under the Federal Excess Property Program (FEPP). The bill is co-sponsored by Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA).

Through the FEPP program, the Forest Service acquires excess Department of Defense aircraft and other federal excess property and loans the property to State Foresters for wildland fire purposes. The program has been in operation since 1956, and states often make substantial investments to improve the equipment and use it for periods well beyond 10 years. The legislation would allow for the transfer of certain aircraft and parts to “authorized users that have demonstrated responsible stewardship over a sustained period.”

- Read more about the [FEPP Program](#)
- View the bill on [Congress.gov](#)

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

Farm Bill Update

On March 5, 2026, the House Agriculture Committee passed the [Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026](#), commonly referred to as the Farm Bill. After a 20-hour markup and the consideration of over 100 amendments, the committee voted 34-17 to pass the bill. The vote was largely along party lines, with seven Democrats joining Republicans in support of the bill.

[Politico reports](#) that Committee Chair G.T. Thompson (R-PA) and other House Republicans are looking to bring the bill to the floor for a vote the last week of April, but the timing may change due to other legislative priorities.

Read more about the bill’s forestry provisions in the [February Newsletter](#).