



Legislative & Policy Update – August 2021

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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 [Danielle Okst](#), Director of Policy.

This month the Senate moved forward on the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (infrastructure bill). The bill provides new federal investments totaling \$550 billion to improve America's infrastructure over five years. Fiscal year (FY) 2022 appropriations is procedurally different this year and is currently working through the reconciliation process which was recently formally approved in both chambers.

Infrastructure Bill

On August 10, the Senate passed the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill ([S. 3684](#)) by a vote of 69 to 30. The legislation has now moved to the House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi has [committed](#) to a September 27 deadline to put the bill up for a vote.

\$1.5 billion in funding over five years for State and Private Forestry (S&PF) is included within the 2,700 page bill. State Fire Assistance would receive \$17.6 million and Volunteer Fire Assistance would receive \$4 million annually in dedicated funding in addition to regular annual appropriations over the next five years. Over the same period, \$500 million total would be available for Community Wildfire Defense Grants. These grants require that a community has adopted home hardening building codes for roofs in order to be eligible. \$718 million of the \$1.5 billion total allocated for S&PF is to fund activities within sections 40803 (wildfire risk reduction) and 40804 (ecosystem restoration).

- The wildfire risk reduction section includes activities, such as:
 - Technology for interoperability of radio frequencies for incident management teams;
 - Prescribed fires;
 - Fuelbreaks;
 - Post-fire restoration;
 - Wildfire detection and monitoring equipment;
 - At-risk community mapping;
 - Pre-planning fire response workshops; and
 - The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.
- The ecosystem restoration section includes activities, such as:
 - Stewardship contracts on not fewer than 25,000 acres of federal land;
 - Good Neighbor Agreements;
 - Financial assistance for processors of ecosystem restoration project byproducts;

- State implementation of ecosystem restoration projects on private or public lands;
- Invasive species detection, prevention, and eradication;
- Grants to states to establish portable skidder bridge rental programs; and
- National revegetation efforts on federal and non-federal lands.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack's [statement](#) highlights how “the bill will increase the scale of wildfire mitigation, funds reforestation projects, and improves post-fire restoration activities so we can better support communities recovering from fire, better manage our forests, and do more to protect our natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities.” President Biden’s remarks on the Senate passage of the bill can be viewed [here](#).

Reconciliation

Tuesday, the House narrowly approved (220-212) a procedural motion which instructs committees to move forward on the \$3.5 trillion budget plan. The budget resolution was previously passed in the Senate by a partisan vote of 50-49. After passing in both chambers, the reconciliation process has formally begun, allowing the Senate to pass budget-related legislation with 51 votes instead of the usual 60 required to end debate. For more information on reconciliation generally, please see [here](#).

Top-level spending instructions provided to each committee were summarized within a [memo](#) from Senate Democrats. Within the Senate, the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry received an instruction of \$135 billion, including forestry programs to help reduce carbon emissions and prevent wildfires and Civilian Climate Corps funding. The House Agriculture Committee has an instruction of \$89.1 billion and the House Natural Resources Committee’s top-level spending is set at \$25.6 billion. The House is currently on recess until September 20, with the aim of having the reconciliation package ready for the House floor upon their return. Committees have a September 15th deadline to prepare their respective sections.