



Legislative & Policy Update – December 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.

After months of negotiations and failed voting deadlines, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was signed into law by President Biden on November 15. The Build Back Better Act, also referred to as the reconciliation bill, passed the House four days later. A previous Continuing Resolution (CR) extended fiscal year (FY) 2021 funding levels through December 3 and another CR was subsequently passed extending funding through February 18.

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ([H.R. 3684](#)) passed the House on November 5th after its bipartisan passage in the Senate back in August. It contains \$550 billion in funding over five FYs and has a \$1.2 trillion price tag when taking into account reauthorized spending. \$1.53 billion in funding over those five FYs is provided for USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) State and Private Forestry, with at least \$88 million specified for State Fire Assistance and \$20 million for Volunteer Fire Assistance. The Forest Service, State Foresters, and partners are diligently coordinating to work on the effective implementation of this massive investment in the forestry sector.

Please see the [August 2021](#) and [September 2021](#) policy updates for additional information on forestry-related provisions contained within this piece of legislation.

Build Back Better Act

The Build Back Better Act ([H.R. 5376](#)) which is intended to be passed without Senate Republicans' support through the budget reconciliation process, passed the House on November 19. The original draft was a \$3.5 trillion package and was cut down to \$1.75 trillion, with spending spanning over ten FYs. \$27 billion in forestry investments still remained in the House passed version.

The version of the bill sent from the House to the other chamber includes the following revised figures from our previous September policy update:

- \$2 billion for grants for forest restoration and resilience projects on non-federal land
- \$1 billion for at-risk community wildfire protection grants
- \$1.25 billion for the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, with a focus on underserved and landowner access to carbon markets
- \$2.5 billion for Urban and Community Forestry grants for tree planting and related activities
- \$150 million for State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance
- \$150 million for implementing State Forest Action Plans
- \$200 million to the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program for various climate-related priorities
- \$1.25 billion for Forest Legacy Program, with a focus on carbon benefits and community resilience
- \$775 million for Wood Innovation Grants
- \$100 million for Community Forest and Open Space for acquisition of urban and community forests
- \$17.1 billion for National Forest System Restoration and Fuels Reduction Projects

Passage in the Senate is contingent on support from all Democrats. Negotiations are still ongoing and there may be additional adjustments to these funding levels as those continue.

Debt Ceiling Raised

On December 15, the House passed a measure by a vote of 221-209 to increase the federal borrowing limit by \$2.5 trillion. The Senate had approved raising the debt ceiling by a vote of 50-49 the day prior.

On November 16, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had warned in a [letter](#) to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) that there may have been insufficient resources to continue to finance the operations of the federal government beyond December 15 without raising or suspending the debt limit. Partisan disagreement over the debt limit continued for weeks after passing a \$480 billion increase which provided a temporary reprieve into December. To facilitate passing this most recent increase to the nation's borrowing capacity, a measure was passed allowing a one-time change to the Senate rules to overcome the filibuster. This enabled Democrats to raise the debt ceiling by simple majority without needing any Republican support.