



Legislative & Policy Update – January 2020

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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, Associate Policy and Grants Director at dokst@westernforesters.org.

Congress passed all 12 appropriations bills funding the government for fiscal year (FY) 2020 before the Continuing Resolution (CR) expired in December. This year, the Administration announced a proposed update to rules under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) aimed at streamlining the process, and a bill was introduced in the House to help lower energy costs and mitigate climate change effects through tree planting.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Revisions Announced

This month, the Council on Environmental Quality posted a [notice of proposed rulemaking](#) to the Federal Register for public comment. The public comment period closes March 10, 2020. At a press conference held at the White House, President Trump stated the proposed changes aim “[to completely overhaul the dysfunctional bureaucratic system that has created these massive obstructions](#)” under current NEPA rules and procedures.

Under the new proposal, agencies would consider the effects that are “reasonably foreseeable” and have a “close causal relationship” to the project rather than the cumulative environmental effects. The new rules would limit projects subject to NEPA review, including an exemption for non-federal projects with little government funding. A time limit for issuance of comprehensive environmental impact statements and restrictions on topics and timing for public comments are also amongst the proposed changes. Implementation of these NEPA revisions may hinge on President Trump’s re-election and inevitable legal challenges from environmental groups.

FY 2020 Appropriations Update

On December 17, the [House passed](#) two spending packages comprising all 12 FY 2020 funding bills. The [Senate subsequently passed](#) and [the President signed](#) both appropriations packages before the deadline of the CR on December 20. One minibus focused on national security (H.R. 1158) while the other was an eight-bill domestic spending package. The domestic package, [H.R. 1865](#), included the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Interior) bill for FY 2020 ([Division D](#) within the full bill). A joint explanatory statement for the Interior bill can be viewed [here](#) and a division-by-division summary can be found [here](#).

The Interior bill for FY 2020 includes a total of \$35.989 billion (\$437 million over FY 2019). The Forest Service total budget is \$7.433 million (\$1.348 million over FY 2019) including the fire funding fix implemented this FY. State and Private Forestry increased \$10 million over FY 2019 levels. An updated budget table containing comparisons of some highlighted programs over the past several years can be found [here](#). Overall, programs stayed at or above FY 2019 funding levels.

The Forest Service Operations Account eliminating cost pools does not take effect for FY 2020 but should be expected in FY 2021 appropriations. The bill directs a restructure proposal be submitted to Congress within 45 days (February 3). The Forest Service's Office of Strategic Planning, Budget, and Accountability must also submit a report by June 1, 2020.

The Residential Energy and Economic Savings (TREES) Act

Doris Matsui (D-CA), John Sarbanes (D-MD), and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) [introduced the TREES Act](#). The TREES Act would create a grant program within the Department of Energy to provide retail power providers financial assistance to support the establishment of new or continued operation of targeted residential tree planting programs meeting certain requirements. Retail power providers are also eligible for grants if they enter into agreements with local nonprofit tree-planting organizations. Alternatively, they may partner with a local municipal government with jurisdiction over the forest or conservation district. An annual 'Arbor City of America' award would provide \$250,000 to the winning city to support future efforts to expand green space and infrastructure. For more information, please see the [press release](#) and NASF's letter of support for this legislation to Congresswoman Matsui [here](#).