



CWSF
COUNCIL OF WESTERN
STATE FORESTERS

Legislative & Policy Update – July 2019

Published July 24, 2019

The [Council of Western State Foresters \(CWSF\) Legislative & Policy Update](#) provides information on issues of importance to the 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 the CWSF and 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, dokst@westernforesters.org.

Legislation aimed at incentivizing mitigation work for fire and other disaster-prone areas was introduced in both Chambers. The House saw the reintroduction of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) this month. A bipartisan budget compromise raising the spending caps for the next two fiscal years (FY) is anticipated to be voted upon before both Chambers begin their summer recesses. Negotiations have been ongoing, with an agreement reached earlier this week.

SHELTER Act Introduction

The SHELTER Act ([S. 1958](#)) was [introduced](#) by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R-LA). A House companion bill, [H.R. 3462](#), was also introduced by Representatives Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) and Charlie Crist (D-FL). The bill would create write-offs for qualifying expenses that reduce the destruction and subsequent costs of increasingly devastating disasters. A summary of the bill can be found [here](#).

This legislation would create disaster mitigation tax credits for families and business owners to protect against hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, droughts, and wildfires when they are located within disaster prone areas. Included within this bill is a 25% credit for mitigation expenses for fire maintenance procedures such as creating defensible space and using fire resistant roof materials. Up to \$5,000 per taxpayer may be received annually for those in areas that the federal government has declared a disaster within the past 10 years.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act of 2019 Introduction

Representatives [Debbie Dingell \(D-MI\)](#) and [Jeff Fortenberry \(R-NE\)](#) reintroduced RAWA as [H.R. 3742](#) this month. The legislation had previously been introduced in 2018 ([H.R. 4647](#) and [S. 3223](#)) and in 2016 ([H.R. 5650](#)), but it never passed committee. H.R. 4647 had 117 cosponsors from both parties and H.R. 3742 has already garnered support from 79 cosponsors since its introduction on July 12.

This bipartisan piece of legislation redirects \$1.397 billion annually to state fish and wildlife agencies for wildlife recovery efforts. The agencies would use these funds to implement the congressionally-mandated State Wildlife Action Plans. These Action Plans identify high priority areas and specific strategies for restoration of species populations based on scientific and public input. Over 12,000 species have been identified by state wildlife agencies as in need of conservation attention. RAWA would provide funding for activities such as fighting invasive species, combating emerging diseases, habitat restoration, and reintroduction of native species.

Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations and Spending Cap Negotiations

The Senate had declined to move forward in the appropriations process pending agreement on budget spending caps following House passage of [H.R. 3055](#), the minibus containing five FY 2020 appropriations bills including the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill. In total, the House has passed 10 of its 12 appropriations bills. Automatic spending cuts were set to reduce discretionary spending by \$125 billion for FY 2020 if negotiators were unable to come to a compromise. The anticipated budget sequester was established in the [Budget Control Act of 2011](#), which set strict spending levels.

Agreement on a bipartisan budget deal has been reached by the [White House](#) and Congress this week. Under the compromise, budget caps would be raised by \$320 billion over the next two FY for defense and domestic programs. In addition to setting spending levels through September 30, 2021, the agreement would also suspend the nation's debt ceiling until July 31, 2021.

Voting is anticipated to take place in the House this week ahead of representatives' six-week recess. The Senate is expected to follow before its recess starting August 2. If lawmakers are able to enact the spending cap agreement prior to departing, they will still need to pass 12 FY 2020 appropriations bills by October 1, when the new fiscal year begins. If they are unable to pass these spending bills, a continuing resolution to temporarily fund the federal government will be needed to avoid a shutdown.