



Legislative & Policy Update – June 2019

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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.

It has been a busy month with the passage of the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2019 (Disaster Supplemental) and the Senate hearing on the outlook for wildland fire and management programs for 2019. The fiscal year (FY) 2020 appropriations process continues in the House, while progress is stalled in the Senate until an agreement on budget spending caps is reached. The USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) has proposed revisions to its National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations, which are open for public comment. The USDA is holding off on shifting the Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers youth employment program operations to the Forest Service for the time being, following public and congressional pushback after the announcement.

Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act, 2019

The Disaster Supplemental ([H.R. 2157](#)) became law after [passing in the House](#) and being signed by the President at the beginning of June. This bill had been heavily debated and stalled due to disagreement surrounding allocation of funds for Puerto Rico. The package aims to assist forest owners, farmers, and other American's impacted by last year's hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters. H.R. 2157 provides funds to help forest owners with debris removal, reforestation, reduction of additional disaster risk, and for certain circumstances, recovery of some lost timber value. This disaster bill also contains \$720.3 million for the Forest Service Wildland Fire Management for 2018 fire transfers.

NEPA Implementation Revision

The Forest Service [published for public comment](#) a proposed revision to the rules governing decision-making processes and environmental analysis under NEPA. [The proposal](#) is the first major rule change for the Forest Service NEPA procedures in more than a decade. These updated regulations would add new administrative categorical exclusions for projects with activities for restoration, roads and trails management, recreation and administrative facility management and special use authorities. It would also codify the existing practice of condition-based management, in order to provide clear and consistent direction and encourage more widespread use. The aim of these changes is to adapt to the need for increased pace and scale for on the ground work by increasing efficiency, while still complying with environmental protections under NEPA. The National Association of State Foresters' (NASF) press release on the proposed revisions can be found [here](#).

Senate Hearing on Outlook for Wildland Fire and Management Programs for 2019

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a [hearing to examine the outlook for wildland fire and management programs for 2019](#). [Shawna Legarza](#), Director of Fire Aviation and Management for the Forest Service, [Jeff Rupert](#), Director of the Office of Wildland Fire for the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), [Wade Crowfoot](#), Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency, and [Chris Maisch](#), Alaska State Forester representing NASF, were asked to testify before the Committee.

Mr. Maisch [testified](#) on the need for congressional action to improve mobilization of state fire resources through fire compacts by addressing the issues around liability within inter-compact resource exchanges. In response to the “Wildfire Technology Modernization” passed within [S. 47](#) (public lands package) earlier this year, Mrs. Legarza reported a three-day industry technology day is being held at the end of June in Boise, ID. Companies will showcase various technological tools for firefighting to an interagency audience so they can work together towards the goal of determining the best path to successfully implementing these new technologies.

Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue announced the Administration will no longer move forward on a plan to transfer the Forest Service’s Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers to the Department of Labor (DOL) at this time. Secretary Perdue originally announced the intention to move operations of the program to DOL, based upon the need for the “Forest Service [to] focus on and prioritize [its] core natural resource mission to improve the condition and resilience of our Nation’s forests, and step away from activities and programs that are not essential to that core mission.” In addition to conservation efforts, students in the Job Corps program also learn [firefighting skills](#). This reversal follows a [bipartisan, bicameral effort](#) to save the youth employment sites that would be closed in the transition led by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR). The [administration plans](#) to “conduct a robust organizational review to determine the appropriate course of action, keeping in mind the [Forest Service] mission, the students we serve, and the American taxpayers. As USDA looks to the future, it is imperative the [Forest Service] focuses on and prioritizes its core natural resource mission to improve the condition and resilience of our Nation’s forests.”

Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations

H. Res. 445 passed the House on June 19, combining five FY 2020 bills, including the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Interior) bill ([H.R. 3052](#)). The House Appropriations Committee released a [division-by-division summary](#) of the minibus, now designated as [H.R. 3055](#). In total, the FY 2020 Interior bill includes \$37.28 billion, an increase of \$1.73 billion over the 2019 enacted level and \$7.24 billion over the President’s FY 2020 request. Additionally, \$2.25 billion of funding is available under the wildfire funding fix. The bill provides \$5.21 billion for Wildland Fire Management, which includes the \$2.25 billion in cap adjusted fire suppression funding. The total funding is \$1.6 billion above the 2019 enacted level and \$49 million above the President’s budget request.

The House Committee on Rules held a hearing on June 18 and [amendments](#) were subsequently debated. An amendment to increase by \$7 million the DOI and Forest Service accounts for wildfire preparedness, wildfire suppression operations, emergency rehabilitation, and hazardous fuels management, and decrease by \$7 million the increase to the Working Capital Fund was accepted. The five-bill appropriations [minibus package passed](#) the House by a vote of 227-194 this Tuesday. Within the other chamber, Senate appropriators have

not taken up any FY 2020 spending bills. Members want to first come to an agreement on spending caps, the budget authority limit imposed on the annual appropriations bills.