



Legislative & Policy Update – May 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 another COVID-19 pandemic response package designed as interim emergency funding. The House subsequently passed a \$3 trillion dollar relief and stimulus package that has not been picked up by the Senate. In the meantime, Representatives have been developing requests they wish to see in future economic stimulus proposals. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) introduced the “21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act” in the upper chamber in an attempt to address the economic fallout as well as support wildfire prevention and preparedness. Adjustment of fire response protocols and development of tools to minimize risk to firefighters continues, with The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group’s (NMAC) Wildland Fire Response Area Command Teams (ACTs) wrapping up their work on regional best management practices this month.

COVID-19 Relief and Stimulus Packages

Following the passage of the CARES Act ([H.R. 748](#)), Congress passed the fourth package to address the pandemic, the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act ([H.R. 266](#)). As noted in the [fact sheet](#), funding in this bill focused on the healthcare sector and the Small Business Administration programs.

On May 15, the House introduced and [passed](#) the Heroes Act ([H.R. 6800](#)) by a vote of 208 to 199. This \$3 trillion dollar coronavirus relief legislation includes \$500 billion for states and \$20 billion for territories (more on [state and local relief](#)) to be used flexibly over the coming years for COVID-19 related expenses, replacement of foregone revenues, or to respond to negative economic impacts of the virus. Both the White House and Senate Republicans have indicated the bill in its current form will not pass the Senate or be signed into law. Republicans are working on their own ideas for the next stimulus package, though it is unclear at this time when that will move forward. A one pager on the legislation passed in the House can be found [here](#) and a section-by-section summary [here](#).

Last week, House Democrats sent a [letter to House leadership](#) pushing for a “Restoration and Resilient Jobs” title in future stimulus packages. Some highlights of this proposal include:

- Fund \$10 billion for restoring, reforesting, and improving resilience of the National Forest System by implementing National Forest Plans and National Grassland Plans and accelerating Collaborative

Forest Landscape Restoration, Vegetation & Watershed Management, Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat Management, Hazardous Fuels, Forest Products, and the Reforestation Trust Fund;

- Fund \$5 billion for implementing the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy on federal, state, tribal, and private lands;
- Fund \$5 billion for improving wildfire preparedness in vulnerable communities through Community Wildfire Defense Grants ([H.R.5091](#)), Assistance to Firefighters Grants, and Fire Protection and Safety Grants;
- Fund \$3 billion for State and Private Forestry to implement State Forest Action Plans;
- Fund \$500 million for the Urban & Community Forestry Program;
- Fund \$2.5 billion for Forest Service Capital Improvement and Maintenance, including Legacy Roads and Trails; and
- Fund \$18.5 billion to enact the Great American Outdoors Act ([S.3422](#)).

21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act

[Senator Ron Wyden](#) (D-OR) introduced [the 21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act](#) to support wildfire prevention and preparedness. The bill would provide full, permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, \$150 million for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, \$3.5 billion for the Forest Service and \$2 billion for BLM for hazardous fuels reduction and thinning, \$6 billion to address the maintenance backlog on National Forest System lands, and \$100 million for land management agencies to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees, contractors, and service workers. Additionally, this legislation would establish a \$9 billion fund for qualified land and conservation corps.

The bill also calls for a \$500 million investment in State and Private Forestry, divided:

- \$100 million for the Landscape Scale Restoration Program;
- \$100 million for the Forest Legacy Program;
- \$100 million for the Urban and Community Forestry Program;
- \$100 million for the Community Forest and Open Space Program; and
- \$100 million for the State Fire Assistance Program.

A section-by-section summary is available [here](#) and a one pager is [here](#).

COVID-19 Fire Preparedness

NMAC [tasked](#) the three ACTs with developing plans in coordination with each Geographic Area Coordination Group. These interagency protocols were integrated into Wildland Fire Response Plans and are available to Geographic Areas, Incident Management Teams, and local units to help guide wildfire response during the COVID-19 pandemic. The [ACTs closed out](#) with NMAC on May 4, 2020, and the teams have demobilized. The Geographic Areas will maintain and update copies of these plans, which are considered living documents. All of the geographic area plans can be found [here](#).

Several helpful resources aimed at better preparing firefighters for the added safety challenges during the pandemic have emerged. The Fire Management Board established the Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT). Guidance developed by MPHAT on screening, prevention and management, and lab testing can be found on the [Wildland Fire COVID-19 portal](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has created a [frequently asked questions page](#) specific to wildland firefighters during the pandemic. A paper entitled "[Wildland Fire Management under COVID-19. Brief 1, Review of Materials](#)," was

put together by an international group. It summarizes procedures and guidance created around the world in an effort to assist preparations by the global wildland fire community.