



CWSF
COUNCIL OF WESTERN
STATE FORESTERS

Legislative & Policy Update – October 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.

The Continuing Resolution (CR) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 was passed by Congress just in time to avoid a lapse in government funding. This CR included language authorizing the implementation of the new budget structure for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service). Disagreements over additional coronavirus relief packages continue, leading to uncertainty over the status of future aid for state budget shortfalls caused by the pandemic.

FY 2021 Appropriations and Forest Service Budget Restructuring

After the [House passed](#) the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act ([H.R. 8337](#)) on September 22, 2020, the Senate passed this CR with mere hours left before the October 1 deadline. It was signed into law by the president, ensuring the government will operate under FY 2020 levels through December 11. In addition to providing this extension for Congress to work on appropriations bills, the Act also provides approximately \$8 billion in nutrition assistance. A section-by-section summary is available [here](#).

Section 148 of H.R. 8337 allows the Forest Service to transition funding to the new budget structure. Congress had requested a report from the Forest Service on the feasibility of restructuring their budget request in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 ([P.L. 115-141](#)). The Committees noted the Forest Service had “been utilizing Cost Pools to pay for certain costs associated with administrative activities, facilities, and other expenses rather than utilizing an ‘administrative account’”. As part of continuing efforts to improve collaboration in budgeting, the Committees have determined that ending the practice of Cost Pools in favor of more direct accounting is in the best interest of the [Forest] Service and the taxpayer” ([Joint Explanatory Statement](#), page 67). Subsequent to this feasibility report, within the FY 2020 omnibus appropriations bill, Congress directed the Forest Service to create a new budget structure ([Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020](#) section 435).

In response to this direction, the Forest Service created a new structure which was implemented on October 1, 2020 as authorized by H.R. 8337. This new budget structure includes the Forest Service Operations Account, which replaces the previous model of using cost pools, along with a budget line item for salaries and expenses within each treasury account. These changes are aimed at increased transparency by showing

what portion of funds allocated go to operational and administrative expenses and what portion goes directly to programmatic costs.

COVID-19 Relief Negotiations

The House passed an updated version of the Heroes Act at the beginning of October. The \$2.2 trillion coronavirus relief package was passed by a vote of 214-207 along party lines. Aid to state and local governments was cut from \$916 billion in the previous bill to \$436 billion in this version. The president had also proposed aid to airlines, another round of \$1,200 direct payments, and an extension of the Paycheck Protection Program. However, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) rejected the idea of an airline relief bill without a broader relief package.

Negotiations have been cycling on and off throughout the month. The White House proposed a \$1.8 trillion relief package with the president indicating a willingness to go higher, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) maintains the \$500 billion figure offered by Senate Republicans is a more realistic figure. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Speaker Pelosi have continued discussions, but following Speaker Pelosi's letter to House Democrats admonishing the White House for failing "miserably" on pandemic response, it appears unlikely an agreement will be reached before the election in November.