



## Legislative & Policy Update – October 2025

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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](#). 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, which provides summaries on other key legislative and programmatic issues. If you have not yet subscribed, you can do so [here](#). For more information, please contact [Neil Simpson](#), CWSF/WFLC Director of Policy.

This month's policy update covers:

- Potential Legislation to Transfer the USDA Forest Service to the Department of the Interior
- Senate Fix Our Forests Act Advances out of Committee
- Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025 Advances out of Committee
- Department of the Interior Reveals Reduction in Force Plans
- Bill Introduced to Require the National Guard to Carry out the FireGuard Program
- Bill Introduced to Improve Wildfire Hazard Alerts with Transportation Closure Information Systems
- Government Accountability Office Report on Wildland Firefighter Communications and Tracking

### Potential Legislation to Transfer the USDA Forest Service to the Department of the Interior

[E&E News](#) reports that Senator Lee (R-UT) is drafting legislation that, if passed, would transfer the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) to the Department of the Interior (DOI).

The draft legislation states that within 18 months of the enactment of the legislation, the Forest Service shall be transferred to the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior. This transfer would include "all functions, powers, duties, personnel, records, property, and unexpended balances of appropriations." The legislation also states that "all valid authorities, rules, regulations, permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and programs of the Forest Service shall remain in full force and effect; and shall be administered by the Secretary of the Interior."

The legislation also would:

- Make the Chief of the Forest Service a political appointee.
- Codify the US Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) within DOI and the position of Chief of the USWFS.
- Name Boise, Idaho, as the National Headquarters for the USWFS.
- Transfer Forest Service fire response to the USWFS.
- Waives overtime paycaps for wildland firefighters.

The potential legislation is closely related to the [Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response Executive Order](#), recent [Executive Memos](#), and USDA reorganization. If the bill is introduced, it would first need to be favorably voted on by the Committee(s) of Jurisdiction in the House of

Representatives before being considered by the full chamber. Then, if it passes the House of Representatives, it would next be considered by the Senate Committee(s) of jurisdiction.

### **Fix Our Forests Act Advances out of Committee**

On Tuesday, October 21, the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry advanced [S. 1462, the Fix Our Forests Act](#), out of committee to be considered by the full Senate. The Committee considered approximately 30 amendments before passing the bill by a margin of 18-5. [View the hearing](#) on the Committee's website.

Notable amendments from the Committee include:

- Adds special districts, such as Conservation Districts, as eligible entities to perform projects and retain and use timber sale revenue under the Good Neighbor Authority (Sec. 111).
- Enhances liability protections for federal employees and partners performing duties on prescribed fires and wildfires.

S. 1462 could proceed to the Senate floor for a vote as a standalone bill or become part of a larger package. The House of Representatives has already passed a separate version of the bill, so reconciling the differences between these two versions is necessary before either can become law. You can read more about both versions in the CWSF [April Newsletter](#).

### **Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025 Advances out of Committee**

The House Committee on Natural Resources has advanced the [Post-Disaster Reforestation and Restoration Act of 2025, H.R. 528](#), out of committee to be considered by the House Representatives. Congresswoman Pettersen (D-CO) introduced the bill in January, and it is co-sponsored by Edwards (R-NC) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA). The bill is also included in the Fix Our Forests Act.

The bill directs DOI to carry out a program to identify and prioritize projects on DOI and National Forest System lands requiring reforestation and restoration following unplanned disturbances that are unlikely to experience natural regeneration without assistance. The bill includes ensuring adequate seed and seedling availability as part of the program, and authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to carry out the projects through competitively awarded grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements.

### **Department of the Interior Reveals Reduction in Force Plans**

The [Government Executive reports](#) that the DOI was planning to lay off approximately 2,000 employees prior to a temporary freeze enacted by federal judge Susan Illston. Illston has stated that the Trump Administration is acting illegally and required nearly three dozen agencies to provide information on pending reductions in force (RIFs). DOI contends the RIFs were planned prior to the federal government shutdown, including 474 layoffs at the Bureau of Land Management and 272 at the National Park Service, or five and two percent of the workforces, respectively. Other layoffs across the Department's Bureaus would occur under the plan.

### **Bill Introduced to Require the National Guard to Carry out the FireGuard Program**

Congressman Whitesides (D-CA) has introduced [H.R. 5615](#) to establish the FireGuard Program as a program of record for the National Guard. The bill would amend the legislation establishing the FireGuard program to require, rather than authorize, the Secretary of Defense to use members of the National Guard to "aggregate, analyze, and assess multi-source remote sensing information for interagency partnerships in the detection and monitoring of wildfires, and to support any emergency response to such wildfires."

The bill has four co-sponsors and has been referred to the House Committee on Armed Services.

## **Bill Introduced to Improve Wildfire Hazard Alerts with Transportation Closure Information Systems**

Senator Sheehy (R-MT) has introduced [S. 2901, the Safer Emergency and Evacuation Routes Response Act of 2025](#). The bill would require the Secretary of Transportation to establish a pilot program to “assist participating states in automatically relaying roadway closures, detours, and evacuation routes to drivers during wildfire events by linking existing National Weather Service hazard alert products with State and local traffic management and traveler information systems.”

The bill has no co-sponsors and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

## **Government Accountability Office Report on Wildland Firefighter Communications and Tracking**

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has issued a report titled [Forest Service: Next Steps Are Uncertain for Improving Communications for Wildland Firefighters and Tracking Their Locations](#). In it, the GAO examines the Forest Service’s capabilities for communications among firefighters and tracking and mapping their locations using various technologies. The report notes that in 2019, the *John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act* required the Forest Service and Department of the Interior to jointly develop and operate a tracking system to remotely locate the positions of fire resources and depict their locations on real-time fire maps. However, currently, the Forest Service is only able to track its firefighting aircraft and vehicles when in areas with cellular coverage, not individual firefighters who are on foot.

The report details testing of several existing technologies, such as GPS-enabled two-way radios and tracking units, but notes barriers such as loss of staff and expertise from the Forest Service, cost, technology interoperability, and how rapidly technologies become obsolete.

GAO concludes that the Forest Service should coordinate with the Department of the Interior and other firefighting agencies to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to improve its wildland firefighter communications, tracking, and mapping capabilities.