



Legislative & Policy Update – October 2026

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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:

- National Association of State Foresters Approves Four Policy Statements
- Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act Passes the Senate
- Bill Introduced to Provide Tax Credits for Mass Timber Production and Research
- Bill Introduced to Require Environmental Impact Statements for Data Centers
- Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Introduced
- FEMA Outlines Strategic Direction in Internal Memo
- Bipartisan Push to get Fix Our Forests Act Signed into Law

National Association of State Foresters Approves Four Policy Statements

Members of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) held their Annual Meeting September 21-24 in Lexington, Kentucky. The theme of the meeting was "Bridging the Divide," and meeting topics focused on solutions and shared efforts to improve outcomes for forests and communities nationwide.

Members approved the following four resolutions and accompanying policy statements:

- *Recommendations to Improve the Health and Sustainability of Federal Forest Resources*
- *Federal Tax Policy and Its Relationship to the Sustainability of Private Forest Lands*
- *Strategic Priorities for the Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis Program*
- *Forest Certification as it Contributes to Sustainable Forestry*

View the resolutions on the NASF [Policy Statements webpage](#).

Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act Passes the Senate

On September 29, 2026, the Senate passed S. 5045, the [Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act of 2026](#) (WEPA), sponsored by Senator John Curtis (R-UT) and co-sponsored by a bipartisan group of colleagues on the Committee on the Environment and Public Works.

NASF has officially endorsed the bill, which generally seeks to increase the use of prescribed fire. It would amend the Clean Air Act to clarify that prescribed fires are exceptional events and require the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to consult with federal land managers, state air pollution control agencies, State Foresters, and state fish and wildlife agencies in an effort to revise existing regulations to focus on state implementation responsibility. The bill also establishes a “Smoke Ready Communities Program,” which authorizes grants for the “assessment, prevention, control, or abatement of wildfire smoke hazards in community buildings” (Sec. 3).

The bill is now being held at the desk in the House of Representatives, which could allow it to bypass committee assignments and move directly to the floor for consideration.

Bill Introduced to Provide Tax Credits for Mass Timber Production and Research

Representative Andrea Salinas (D-OR) has introduced H.R. 10852, the [Mass Timber Growth and Innovation Act](#), which would provide tax incentives for mass timber production facilities and research.

The bill would amend [Section 48D\(b\)](#) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to add mass timber manufacturing facilities to the current definition of an advanced manufacturing facility and create a tax incentive equal to 10% of the qualified investment into mass timber manufacturing facilities. The bill would extend the current credit and make mass timber facilities eligible for projects that begin construction before December 31, 2031. The bill would also amend [Section 41\(a\)](#) to allow a 20% research tax credit for mass timber research.

It is cosponsored by House Agriculture Committee Chair Glenn “G.T.” Thompson (R-PA) and has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

Bill Introduced to Require EIS for Data Centers on Public Land

Representative Dina Titus (D-NV) has introduced H.R. 10465, the [Public Lands Accountability Act](#). The bill would require the Director of the Bureau of Land Management to conduct an environmental impact statement (EIS) for any new data centers on public land. Additionally, the bill would require at least a 45-day comment period on the draft EIS, a public hearing, and an analysis of the water required to operate the data center.

The bill is cosponsored by Representatives Val Hoyle (D-OR), Raul Ruiz (D-CA), and Jared Huffman (D-CA). It has been referred to the House Agriculture and House Natural Resources Committees.

Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Introduced

Senators Jim Risch, Mike Crapo (both R-ID), Ron Wyden, and Jeff Merkley (both D-OR) have introduced S. 5608, the [Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2026](#). The bill would reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (SRS) until 2029.

SRS compensates local governments for the presence of tax-exempt federal lands within their borders. It was originally enacted as a temporary program in 2000 after a drastic decline in federal timber harvest led to a proportional reduction in payments to local governments under longstanding revenue-sharing laws. The original law expired in 2006, and it has been modified and reauthorized several times. The most recent reauthorization was in 2025, extending SRS through September 30, 2026.

In a [press release](#), Senator Merkley stated, “The SRS program provides crucial payments that are a lifeline for rural communities here in Oregon and across America—keeping schools open, maintaining roads, restoring watersheds, and providing funding for police officers and firefighters to keep families safe. A three-year extension of the program is critical to ensuring the federal government upholds its promise to our communities and that local governments can reliably access these important resources.”

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

FEMA Outlines Strategic Direction in Internal Memo

On October 15, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released an internal memo that outlines a shift in strategic direction and agency priorities. The memo outlines four priority objectives to guide decision-making, resource alignment, operational planning, workforce efforts, intergovernmental coordination, and program execution.

According to [Politico](#), the memo states four policy priorities.

- Reduce Federal Government Dependency
 - “Reducing federal dependency requires partners to build, maintain, and exercise the capabilities needed to manage incidents effectively.”
- Deliver America First Resilience
 - “FEMA will advance national resilience by protecting the American people, reducing risks to life and property, and strengthening the systems on which the United States relies before, during, and after disasters. This objective will be guided by balanced federalism, clear accountability, measurable outcomes, and investments that provide practical value to the homeland.”
- Return Power to the American People
 - “FEMA will move appropriate authority, decision-making, and execution closer to the American people by empowering state, local, tribal, and territorial partners; strengthening regional and field leadership; and supporting practical, risk-informed readiness nationwide.”
- Strengthen National Security
 - “FEMA will prioritize efforts based on likelihood, consequence, and national value.”

Conversations and press about the memo [prompted a response](#) from FEMA Chief of Staff John Scardena.

Bipartisan Push to get Fix Our Forests Act Signed into Law

On October 23, 2026, 14 Republican and 17 Democratic members of Congress [sent a letter](#) to House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL), and Committee Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-WA) urging them to include the Fix Our Forests Act in the fiscal year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The letter describes the scale and cost of the wildfire crisis and notes that wildfire mitigation can help reduce the catastrophic impacts from wildfires, “at a cost savings of \$3.75 in prevented damages for every \$1.00 spent.”

It states that “the Fix Our Forests Act represents the best chance to realize those savings while improving forest health, streamlining wildfire mitigation, and defending communities across the country.”

The House of Representatives passed [its version, H.R. 471](#), of the Fix Our Forests Act in January of 2025. The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry has passed a slightly different version, [S. 1462](#), but it has not yet been brought to the floor for a vote. Both versions are comprehensive bills with wide-ranging provisions that would streamline federal forest management and implement numerous items related to wildfire prevention, mitigation, and response.