



Legislative & Policy Update – September 2018

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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](#).

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Congress has maintained a busy schedule this month with a top priority being to pass fiscal year (FY) 2019 spending legislation. Another priority issue with a ticking clock is the Farm Bill. This policy update covers recent activity on those two issues, as well as the confirmation of James (Jim) Hubbard as the Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) and details on a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing on air quality impacts from wildfire.

FY 2019 Appropriations

The FY 2019 federal fiscal year begins October 1 and Congress is working quickly before then to send as many FY 2019 appropriations bills to the President's desk for signature. This year, both the House and the Senate have passed appropriations minibuses, smaller bundled subsets of the 12 individual appropriations bills together, in an effort to avoid trying to pass a single, large omnibus spending measure later this calendar year.

Earlier this month, both chambers passed a first minibus comprised of three of the FY 2019 appropriations bills ([H.R. 5895](#)) and President Trump signed that bill into law. House and Senate conferees then found agreement on a second two-bill minibus ([H.R. 6157](#)). The Senate passed the second minibus in mid-September and the House voted to approve it this week. There is uncertainty, however, over whether the President will sign the measure. Attached to the appropriations measure is a continuing resolution (CR) that will provide funding for federal agencies whose respective appropriations bills aren't completed before October 1. The CR will run until December 7.

A third minibus is currently under negotiation. It is comprised of four appropriations bills; one of them the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill that funds the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior. House and Senate negotiators on the conference committee have been working to come to agreement on those appropriations bills. With limited time before the end of the current fiscal year, it is unclear if the third minibus will be completed before the deadline. If the clock runs out on FY 2018 and no

agreement is reached, the Forest Service and other federal agencies funded by these appropriations bills will operate under the short-term CR that is likely to pass as part of the second minibus mentioned above.

Farm Bill

Conferees to the Farm Bill conference committee continue to reconcile differences in the House and Senate versions of the Farm Bill; however, time is running out before the end of September when much of the current 2014 Farm Bill expires and agreement by conferees remains out of reach. There remain sticking points in negotiations on issues such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and it is increasingly unlikely that Congress will pass a new Farm Bill before the end of this month. Agriculture Committee leaders have recently indicated that the mid-term elections in November may be the new target to pass a Farm Bill by. There has also been talk of an extension of the existing Farm Bill, however there is not currently appetite for this route as Agriculture Committee leaders express strong preference for getting the Farm Bill reauthorization done.

Senate Confirmation of USDA Under Secretary of NRE

In late August, the Senate [confirmed](#) Jim Hubbard as the USDA Under Secretary for NRE. Following the confirmation, USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue issued the following [statement](#), “I’m very excited for Jim to finally join our team here at USDA. His decades of experience, both in Colorado and across the federal government, make him uniquely qualified for this role and I’m confident that he will hit the ground running. I commend the Senate for its approval of Jim and urge Senators to take up other USDA nominees as quickly as possible.” Under Secretary Hubbard was sworn into his role on September 5.

House Energy and Commerce Committee Hearing

The House Energy and Commerce Committee [held a hearing](#) this month on air quality impacts of wildfires: mitigation and management strategies. State Foresters Sonya Germann (MT) and Tom Boggus (TX) testified.

Germann’s [testimony](#) offered a summary of the 2018 fire year across the country thus far, information on the importance of hazardous fuels reductions treatments across all-lands, and the impacts of wildfire smoke on air quality. Her testimony also highlighted the Montana perspective including recent forestry initiatives by the State, use of prescribed fire and the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group model to regulate prescribed burning. In a powerful closing statement, Germann shared that “As State Foresters, we believe that, to avert a forest health and wildland fire crisis, we need to be doing significantly more hazardous fuels reduction throughout the country. Hazardous fuels reduction and prescribed fire treatments decrease fuel loading in the forests so that when wildfires inevitably occur, they burn with less intensity and reduced spread, burn for shorter periods of time, and produce fewer smoke impacts on firefighters, citizens, and communities.”

Boggus’ [testimony](#) offered comments on 2018 fire activity, including in the state of Texas, and explained the importance of hazardous fuels treatments on landscapes in order to mitigate wildfire impacts. His testimony also addressed the differing air quality impacts from prescribed fire compared to unplanned wildfire, and how southern states manage prescribed fire for air quality.