



Legislative & Policy Update – September 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:

- Continuing Resolutions Fail, Increasing Likelihood of a Government Shutdown
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Announce Secretarial Direction to Unify and Improve the Federal Wildland Fire System
- USDA Announces New Political Appointees to Serve as Senior Advisors at the Forest Service
- Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act Advances out of Committee
- Upcoming Hearing on Wildfire and Forestry Bills
- USDA Reorganization Comment Due September 30, 2025

Continuing Resolutions Fail, Increasing Likelihood of a Government Shutdown

The House of Representatives passed a Republican-drafted continuing resolution (CR) to fund the government until November 21 and then recessed until October 1, the day a shutdown would begin. The House bill, and a CR drafted by Democrats, failed in the Senate, where Republicans hold 53 seats, Democrats hold 47, and bills need 60 votes to pass. The Senate is on recess until September 29.

The two bills show how far apart the parties are in reaching an agreement. The Republicans' CR is being referred to as a "clean CR," while the Democrats' CR contains several provisions related to healthcare and restoring cuts from Republicans' *One Big Beautiful Bill*. [Politico](#) reports President Trump has agreed to meet with House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) to discuss funding the government, but leaders of both parties [show no signs of budging](#). In the unlikely event the meeting yields a compromise, Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) would need to recall the House from its recess to vote on new legislation, leaving few, if any, paths to avoid a shutdown.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Announce Secretarial Direction to Unify and Improve the Federal Wildland Fire System

On September 15, 2025, DOI and USDA announced efforts and directions from the respective Secretaries to implement the [Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response](#) Executive Order. Both Departments issued similar press releases highlighting that this is a coordinated effort between the Departments. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum stated "By streamlining federal capabilities and strengthening our partnerships with state, tribal and local teams, we will deliver the common-sense reforms

needed to safeguard our communities, our lands and our future.” and Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins stated “we are taking bold action to modernize wildfire response systems, streamline federal wildfire capabilities, and strengthen their effectiveness.”

- The DOI [press release](#) announces [Secretarial Order No. 3443, Elevating and Unifying DOI's Wildland Fire Management Program](#)
- The USDA [press release](#) announces [Secretary's Memorandum 10787 - 017, Improving the Performance of the National Wildland Fire System with Targeted Federal Reforms](#)

The Memo and Order share several directives, including:

- Unified wildland fire aircraft and pilot inspection, carding, procurement, contracting, standards, and acceptance procedures.
- Improved interoperability through qualification and training standardization with the Department of Homeland Security, tribes, states, and local governments within 180 days.
- Revise the Master Interagency Agreement for Wildland Fire Management to ensure consistent alignment in policy and program delivery across DOI and USFS within 120 days.
- Begin establishment of joint USDA and DOI procurement, contracting, and payment centers to the extent possible to consolidate payment and auditing systems and accelerate reimbursement procedures to states, tribes, contractors, and local governments.
- Initiate the consolidation and modernization of wildland fire Predictive Services at the national and regional levels into a centralized Fire Intelligence function.
- Standardize wildland fire position descriptions and establish a joint Administratively Determined hiring program and pay plan within 180 days.
- Employing a broad, formal process for soliciting input from key stakeholders, such as state, tribal, and local government, to take the following actions:
 - Complete revision of the Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement template.
 - Immediately initiate the modernization, consolidation, and simplification processes for grants, agreements, and assistance.
- Establish a joint USDA-DOI governance structure to coordinate wildfire research, technology development, and IT modernization and integration.
- Utilize a unified wildfire risk mapping tool to plan mitigation activities and demonstrate wildfire risk reduction across federal, state, local, and private lands.

In addition to the shared items, the DOI Order contains several significant changes to the DOI's wildland fire structure.

- Establishes the U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) and directs the department's primary fire and aviation bureaus and offices to finalize a plan consolidating line authority and management of DOI wildland fire management. The plan will be implemented on January 12, 2026.
- Creates a USWFS Chief position to oversee the programs' appropriations, firefighters, and managers. It directs the prompt recruitment and appointment of an individual to serve in the new Senior Executive Service position.

The USDA Memo also contains a restructuring item. It directs the Chief of the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) to develop proposals for restructuring the internal wildland fire organization by creating a Deputy Chief to whom all wildland fire leadership will report. Additionally, the Chief must assess staffing, organization, and position descriptions to ensure consistency. Implementation of both of these items will begin by April 1, 2026.

USDA Announces New Political Appointees to Serve as Senior Advisors at the Forest Service

Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced twelve new presidential appointments at the USDA, including two new Senior Advisors for the Forest Service. A [September 19, 2025, press release](#) provides the following information.

Ken Verheyen serves as Senior Advisor for the U.S. Forest Service. Ken spent over 40 years building a values-driven, industry-leading, world-class technology service company. Leveraging his operational expertise, Ken led the company to build a strong reputation of excellence in customer service and innovation across the life science, aerospace, food and beverage, and multiple government sectors. Ken is an avid outdoorsman and enthusiastically supports responsible stewardship of our amazing national forests.

Layne Bangerter serves as Senior Advisor for the U.S. Forest Service. Layne created and operates a successful farm and ranch operation in Utah, Nevada, and Idaho. He previously worked on the first Trump campaign and in the Administration, serving at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as Deputy Associate Administrator, and later serving at USDA as the Idaho Rural Development State Director. Layne has an extensive federal service résumé and policy experience, having worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA-APHIS, and 14 years with the U.S. Senate. He holds a degree in Wildlife and Range Resource Management from BYU.

Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act Advances out of Committee

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure voted to advance [H.R. 4669](#), the *Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act* which would re-establish the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as an independent, cabinet-level agency reporting directly to the President and generally makes reforms to federal grant, permitting, and procurement processes in an effort to accelerate recovery efforts and provide better services to disaster survivors.

It would amend the Stafford Act to allow for mitigation measures and authorize Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) to be used for “assessments and emergency stabilization to protect public safety irrespective of the incident period of the declared fire.”

The bill was introduced by Representative Graves (R-MO). It was co-sponsored by 13 Republicans and 8 Democrats and passed by an overwhelming 57-3. The bill was also referred to the House Committee on Homeland Security and must be passed by it before being considered by the full House of Representatives.

Upcoming Hearing on Wildfire and Forestry Bills

On October 1, 2025, the [Senate Energy and Natural Resources](#) Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining will hold a hearing on 26 bills covering a wide range of forestry, fire, and public lands issues. Wyoming State Forester Kelly Norris will testify on S. 140. *The Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025*. A few other bills included in the hearing are:

- [S. 140](#) — *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025*, sponsored by Senator Barrasso (R-WY)
- [S. 91](#) — *Western Wildfire Support Act of 2025*, sponsored by Senator Cortez Masto (D-NV)
- [S. 902](#) — *Wildfire Response and Preparedness Act of 2025*, sponsored by Senator Sheehy (R-MT)
- [S. 2033](#) — *Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act*, sponsored by Senator Gallego (D-AZ)

USDA Reorganization Comments Due September 30, 2025

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins issued a [Secretarial Memorandum](#) on July 24, 2025, directing the reorganization of the USDA. According to the [press release](#), the reorganization consists of four pillars:

- Ensure the size of the USDA's workforce aligns with available financial resources and agricultural priorities
- Bring USDA closer to its customers
- Eliminate management layers and bureaucracy
- Consolidate redundant support functions

A primary goal is to move staff from the Washington D.C. area to five new hubs throughout the country. The memo states that the Forest Service will phase out the nine regional offices, consolidate research stations into a single station in Fort Collins, Colorado, and retain the Fire Sciences and Forest Products Labs.

The Secretary's Memo, along with President Trump's [*Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response*](#) Executive Order, is guiding the Forest Service Reorganization plans. The USDA initially opened a 30-day [public comment period](#) on August 1, 2025, but it has been extended until September 30, 2025.