



Legislative & Policy Update – May 2024

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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 [Neil Simpson](#), Director of Policy.

This month's policy update highlights:

- 2024 Farm Bill
- Fiscal year 2025 appropriations
- Loggers Assistance and Relief Act introduced
- Fire Weather Development Act passes the House
- Flexible Funding for State Forest Action Plans and Reforestation Nurseries, and Genetic Resources (RNGR) bills introduced in the Senate

Farm Bill News

Progress on the 2024 Farm Bill is being made in the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee and the House Agriculture Committee. Both committees released overviews on May 1. The House Agriculture Committee has since released a more detailed summary, and Chair Thomson (R-PA) has scheduled a markup of the bill for May 23. He has also indicated they will release the bill's text about one week before that.

The summaries highlight key differences between the Democrat-led Senate version and the Republican-led House version. [Politico reports](#) Chairman Thompson has stated the Senate version "doesn't appear to include GOP input or reflect the highest priorities we have heard loud from American farmers." Similarly, House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member David Scott (D-GA) issued a [statement](#) that includes, "By insisting on poison pill policies, Republicans have turned what could have been a genuinely bipartisan bill into a messaging exercise to appease their right flank that has no chance of becoming law."

- Read the [House summary here](#).
- Read the [Senate summary here](#).

The House summary includes nearly 40 specific forestry title items in a bulleted list format. A few key bullets directly from the House summary are that the bill:

- Includes [H.R. 1450](#) to authorize counties and tribes to retain and use timber sale receipts on land covered by the GNA agreement.
- Codifies the Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetics Resources Program by including provisions from [H.R. 5381](#).
- Allows the flexible use of funding for the development and implementation of State forest action plans.
- Reauthorizes the Landscape-Scale Restoration Program.
- Expands the Insect and Disease, wildfire resilience, and Fuel Break Categorical Exclusions to 10,000 acres
- Includes [H.R. 200](#), the Cottonwood Fix.
- Updates the definition of an “at-risk community” under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.
- Includes provisions from [H.R. 6717](#) to improve the Emergency Forest Restoration Program by offering advance payments of up to 75% of the cost of the emergency measures.

The Senate summary provides information on over 50 sections within the forestry title of the bill. Some of the highlights directly from the summary state that the bill:

- Expands Good Neighbor Authority to allow Counties and Tribes to retain revenue received from timber sales.
- Established dedicated staff for the Forest Service Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources Program (RNGR).
 - Creates a grant program for State, Tribal, and private nurseries to improve nursery production capacity.
 - Authorizes \$25 million in appropriations for Fiscal Years 25 through 29.
 - Authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to obligate funds from the reforestation trust fund to support seed collection, storage, and nurseries.
- Supports state forest action plans by extending the authorization for states to conduct projects under the Cooperative Assistance Act of 1978.
- Extends the authorization of appropriations for a State and Private Landscape-Scale Restoration Program for fiscal years 2025 through 2029 for a competitive grant program to encourage collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes.
- Expands Forest Service authority to categorically exclude certain vegetation management projects that enhance wildlife habitat or improve forest health.
- Establishes an Urban and Community Forestry Office within the Forest Service and increases U&CF appropriations to 80 million annually for fiscal years 2025 through 2029.
- Requires the Secretary of Agriculture and Interior to establish one or more prescribed fire training centers.
- Authorizes a new Emergency Forest Watershed Program to address runoff, soil erosion, and flooding caused by natural disasters on National Forest System Land.

Appropriations News for Fiscal Year 2025

USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) Chief Randy Moore will testify in a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Hearing to Examine the President’s Budget Request for the Forest Service on May 16 at 10:00 a.m. Eastern Time. Access a live webcast and a future recording [here](#).

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) has submitted written testimony to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The testimony highlights the vital support the Forest Service’s State, Private, and Tribal Forestry mission area provides State Foresters in delivering technical and financial assistance and wildfire protection on two-thirds of the nation’s 751 million acres of forest. The table below shows the key programs for which NASF recommends increased funding. The table also shows the Forest Service budget request and historical appropriations for these programs.

Read more about the NASF appropriations platform on their [website](#).

USDA Forest Service Budget Highlights and NASF Recommendations [in Millions]					
Program	FY 22 Enacted	FY 23 Enacted	FY 24 Enacted Consolidated Approp. Act	FY 25 USFS Budget Request	FY 25 NASF Recommendation
Forest Inventory and Analysis*	\$22.20	\$32.20	\$31.50	\$ 33.70	\$32.43
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$14.00	\$17.00	\$14.00	\$ 17.00	\$20.00
Forest Health Management - Cooperative Lands	\$32.00	\$33.00	\$32.00	\$ 33.00	\$39.43
State Fire Assistance	\$75.00	\$76.00	\$76.00	\$ 76.00	\$85.00
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$20.00	\$21.00	\$21.00	\$ 21.00	\$25.00
Forest Stewardship	\$12.00	\$12.50	\$12.00	\$ 12.50	\$22.00
Forest Legacy Program***	\$88.88	\$77.94	\$92.25	\$ 94.23	\$128.00
Urban and Community Forestry	\$36.00	\$40.00	\$36.00	\$ 40.00	\$42.00

*NASF asks that Congress work with the USDA Forest Service to establish a budget line item for FIA salaries and expenses.

***Forest Legacy is funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Legislation Introduced to Support Loggers Harmed by Natural Disasters

Senator Collins (R-ME) and Representative Golden (D-ME) have introduced the Loggers Assistance and Relief Act. Senator Angus King co-sponsored (I-ME) the Senate version of the Bill. Representatives Stauber (R-MN) and Pingree (D-ME) co-sponsored the House version.

According to the press release, current law excludes loggers from the kinds of disaster relief and assistance available to other industries when natural disasters strike. Under the legislation, a disaster declaration would unlock federal assistance eligibility for logging businesses with at least a 10 percent loss in revenue or volume compared to the prior year.

[Read the press release here.](#)

House Passes Fire Weather Development Act

Representative Mike Garcia's (D-CA) Fire Weather Development Act has passed the House with bipartisan support. The legislation intends to improve forecasting and detection of wildfires and streamline communication during emergency events.

The bill aims to improve emergency communications; streamline data collection for local communities; improve research and monitoring tools, including the use of unmanned drone technology. It also equips the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to improve the accuracy of fire weather and fire environment forecasts and warnings in order to reduce loss of life and protect property.

- [Read the bill text here.](#)
- [Read the press release here.](#)

Flexible Funding for State Forest Action Plans and Reforestation Nurseries, and Genetic Resources (RNGR) bills Introduced in the Senate

U.S. Senators John Hickenlooper (D-CO) and Roger Marshall (R-KS) introduced two bipartisan bills to expand the Forest Service's ability to plan and invest in forest health and reforestation efforts. The [Branch Out Implementation Act](#) and the [Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources \(RNGR\) Support Act](#) would offer State Foresters greater flexibility to manage, plan, and implement their Forest Action Plans and would strengthen existing reforestation and nursery programs.

[Read the press release here.](#)