



Legislative & Policy Update – January 2025

Published January 22, 2025

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:

- Executive Orders
- Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Interior, and USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Information
- Government Accountability Office Report on FEMA Wildfire Assistance
- Changes to Good Neighbor Authority in the EXPLORE Act
- Disaster Relief Funding and Continuing Resolution from 118th Congress
- Old Growth Environmental Impact Statement Withdrawn
- Wildfire Bills Introduced in the 119th Congress

Executive Orders

On the first day of his presidency, President Trump signed numerous executive orders (EO), including:

The [Return To In-person Work EO](#) states, "Heads of all departments and agencies in the executive branch of Government shall, as soon as practicable, take all necessary steps to terminate remote work arrangements and require employees to return to work in-person at their respective duty stations on a full-time basis."

The [Unleashing American Energy EO](#) is largely aimed at encouraging energy production and streamlining permitting processes. It also states, "All agencies shall immediately pause the disbursement of funds appropriated through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (Public Law 117-169) or the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58), including but not limited to funds for electric vehicle charging stations made available through the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Formula Program and the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant Program, and shall review their processes, policies, and programs for issuing grants, loans, contracts, or any other financial disbursements of such appropriated funds for consistency with the law and the policy outlined in section 2 of this order."

The [Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing EO](#) states that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs are "immoral discrimination programs" and that all DEI, Diversity,

equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) programs and all DEI, DEIA environmental justice offices and positions shall be terminated, to the maximum extent allowed by law.

The implementation of these EOs is an evolving process that we will continue to monitor.

Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Interior, and USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment Information

Hearing Scheduled for Secretary of Agriculture Nominee Brooke Rollins

The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry will hold a hearing on January 23, 2025, for Secretary of Agriculture nominee Brooke Rollins at 10:00 a.m. EST.

View the hearing live on the [Committee's website](#).

Hearing Held for Secretary of Interior Nominee Doug Burgum

On January 16, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to consider Doug Burgum's nomination as Secretary of the Interior.

View a recording of the hearing on the [Committee's website](#).

Michael Boren Nominated as USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment

On January 16, President Trump announced on Truth Social that Michael Boren will serve as the United States Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department of Agriculture.

"I am pleased to announce that Michael Boren will serve as the United States Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department of Agriculture.

Michael is a successful businessman, who has founded six companies, including Clearwater Analytics. He has also served as a volunteer fireman for Sawtooth Valley Rural Fire Department, and as a board member of the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.

Michael will work to reinvigorate Forest Management at a time when it is desperately needed."

Boren is an Idaho businessman and the founder of Clearwater Analytics, based in Boise, Idaho.

Government Accountability Office Report on FEMA Wildfire Assistance

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has issued a report examining assistance provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to wildfire-affected communities from fiscal years 2019 through 2023. The GAO interviewed officials from 22 state, local, and tribal governments to examine the challenges communities face in obtaining FEMA assistance.

The report examines assistance provided through Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG), Major Disaster and Emergency Declarations, competitive grants for mitigation and preparedness, and technical assistance such as FEMA's U.S. Fire Administration technical support to communities.

The report recognizes that FEMA has “taken some steps to address long-standing challenges providing wildfire assistance.” [The GAO Report](#) makes the following six recommendations to improve the delivery of FEMA wildfire assistance.

- The FEMA Administrator should assess ways to provide assistance for immediate post-wildfire mitigation and take steps to provide such assistance. If FEMA determines it needs additional authorities, it should develop a legislative proposal for implementing the proposed change(s).
- The Secretary of Homeland Security should follow the process to expand, establish, or adopt a categorical exclusion for wildfire mitigation activities that includes post-wildfire soil stabilization and erosion control measures.
- The FEMA Administrator should establish a formal process to regularly collect and assess nationwide feedback from state, local, and tribal FMAG recipients and incorporate such feedback into program policy, as appropriate.
- The FEMA Administrator should document its position on approving FMAG declarations for fires burning on federal land but threatening nearby communities in the FMAG Program and Policy Guide.
- The FEMA Administrator should clarify eligible pre-positioning costs, including use of in-state resources, in the FMAG Program and Policy Guide.
- The FEMA Administrator should amend the FMAG regulations to provide tribal governments the option to request FMAG declarations directly from FEMA.

Good Neighbor Authority in the EXPLORE Act

The 118th Congress passed H.R. 6492, [the EXPLORE Act](#), introduced by Representative Westerman (R-AR). The wide-ranging bill covers numerous topics related to recreation. It also creates a new Good Neighbor for Recreation Authority and amends the 2018 Farm Bill Good Neighbor Authority provisions to:

- Authorize counties and tribes to retain timber sale revenue.
- Remove the requirement that revenue be spent on federal land.
- Authorize the use of revenue for authorized recreation services.
- Extend the expiration of the authorization to retain revenue to October 1, 2028.

Disaster Relief Bill and Continuing Resolution

The 118th Congress passed [H.R.10545, the American Relief Act, 2025](#), otherwise known as a continuing resolution. The bill also includes supplemental appropriations for wide-ranging disasters across the country. Included in it was \$29 billion for FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund and \$356.5 million for the USDA Farm Service’s Agency Emergency Forest Restoration Program. The Forest Service was appropriated the following amounts for “necessary expenses related to the consequences of calendar year 2022, 2023, and 2024 wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters.”

- Forest Service Operations: \$68,100,000
- Forest and Rangeland Research: \$26,000,000
- National Forest System: \$2,523,000,000
- Capital Improvement and Maintenance: \$3,525,000,000
- State, Private, and Tribal Forestry: \$208,000,000

The majority of Forest Service funding is expected to go to hurricane recovery, with some funds coming to Western states for wildfire recovery efforts.

Old Growth Environmental Impact Statement

The Forest Service has withdrawn its Notice of Intent to Prepare a National Old Growth Amendment Environmental Impact Statement. Chief Randy Moore describes the decision in [Inside the Forest Service](#), and the official notification was published in the [January 10 Federal Register](#).

Wildfire Legislation Introduced in the 119th Congress

Torch Act Introduced

Representative LaMalfa (R-CA) introduced H.R. 168, the Targeted Operations to Remove Catastrophic Hazards (TORCH) Act, on the first day of the 119th Congress.

According to the [press release](#), the bill will:

- Expand categorical exclusions from NEPA to allow thinning and post-fire recovery across much larger areas of our national forests.
- Expand upon the [CLEAR Zones Act](#) to improve the safety of electrical lines by removing hazardous trees and vegetation in high-risk areas.
- Exempts the U.S. Forest Service from re-consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on new species information. (Commonly referred to as the Cottonwood Fix).
- Includes provisions from Rep. LaMalfa's previous bill, [H.R. 7666](#), which directs the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a strategy to expand livestock grazing to reduce wildfire risk.

The bill currently has no co-sponsors, and text is not yet available on [Congress.gov](#). It has been referred to the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Natural Resources.

Western Wildfire Support Act Introduced

Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Tim Sheehy (R-MT) reintroduced the Western Wildfire Support Act, which generally seeks to improve federal wildfire activities.

A few highlights from the 16-part bill include:

- Establishes accounts in the Treasury for addressing wildfires.
- Establishes a program to train and certify citizens who wish to be able to volunteer to assist USDA or Interior during a wildland fire incident.
- Permanently authorizes a program to award grants to eligible states or units of local government to acquire slip-on tanks.
- Requires the Joint Fire Science Program to work with unmanned aircraft test ranges to carry out research and development of unmanned aircraft system fire applications.
- Requires federal and state disaster preparedness programs to include post-disaster assistance.
- Authorizes the FEMA to provide funding to a state agency to establish and operate a website to provide information relating to postfire recovery funding and resources to a community or an individual impacted by a wildland fire.

Links to the bill text and a section-by-section summary can be found in the [press release](#).

Act Introduced to Authorize NASA's Advanced Capabilities for Emergency Response Operations.

Representatives Vince Fong (R-CA) and Jennifer McClellan (D-VA) introduced the ACERO Act to authorize NASA's Advanced Capabilities for Emergency Response Operations (ACERO) project. According to the [press release](#), the bill authorizes NASA's ACERO project to develop technology for drones to improve wildfire response operations. Specifically, the bill helps improve the management, deconfliction, and coordination of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles in emergency response activities, including by requiring NASA to create a unified concept of operations for the management of airspace during wildfires.

Fix Our Forests Act Reintroduced

On January 16, 2025, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) and Congressman Scott Peters (D-CA) [re-introduced](#) the Fix Our Forests Act, [H.R. 471](#). On January 21, the House Committee on the Rules held a [hearing](#) on the bill signaling that it is likely to advance quickly for a floor vote.

The 80-page bill, which passed the House in the 118th Congress, but did not see a vote in the Senate, includes three titles: Landscape Scale Restoration, Protecting Communities in the Wildland-Urban Interface, and Transparency and Technology. It generally seeks to expedite the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and improve forest management activities on National Forest System Lands, with some sections aimed at implementing recommendations in the [Wildland Fire Management and Mitigation Commission Report](#).

A few highlights from the bill include:

- Designates Fireshed Management Areas and directs the use of streamlined authorities to carry out fuels and fire management projects within the fireshed.
- Establishes a Fireshed Center comprised of 14 federal agencies and housed jointly within the USDA Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey.
- Establishes the Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program comprised of eight federal agencies. The purpose of the program is to advance research and science, support local adoption of code and standards, support local efforts to address wildfire impacts including property damage, air and water quality, encourage public-private partnerships for fuel reduction, and provide technical and financial assistance to communities.
- Expands the Joint Fire Science Program to advance research on innovative designs to create or improve wildfire-resistant structures and communities.
- Requires the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to establish standard operating procedures that ensure payments to local fire departments are made within one year.