



Legislative & Policy Update – February 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:

- USDA Forest Service Rehiring Some Probationary Employees
- USDA Forest Service Chief Randy Moore Announces Retirement
- USDA Releases Funding
- Wildfire Legislation in the 119th Congress

USDA Forest Service Rehiring Some Probationary Employees

On February 24, [E&E news](#) reported that the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) is compiling a “small” number of terminated employees to be rehired and that managers may have an opportunity to request the return of additional staff.

Forest Service Chief Randy Moore Announces Retirement

On February 26, Forest Service Chief Randy Moore announced his retirement in a letter to agency staff. The letter is posted in the [Inside the Forest Service newsletter](#) and his retirement is effective March 3, 2025.

USDA Releases Funding

In a [press release](#) on February 20, 2025, the USDA announced that Secretary Rollins has “released the first tranche of funding under review.” The first group of funding has been reviewed, and \$20 million in contracts for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs have been released.

The press release states that USDA continues to review Inflation Reduction Act funding, and additional announcements, are forthcoming.

View [USDA press releases](#).

Wildfire Legislation in the 119th Congress

The Western Wildfire Support Act of 2025, [S. 91](#), Introduced by Senator Cortez Masto (D-NV) and cosponsored by Senator Sheehy (R-MT), has been referred to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The bill generally seeks to improve federal wildland firefighting activities and create greater transparency in wildfire cost accounting.

A few highlights from the 15-part bill include:

- Requires the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to review existing fire management policies in areas (firesheds) that could pose risks to first responders, communities, and infrastructure and coordinate with states to identify potential wildfire control locations.
- Directs the Secretaries to expedite the placement of wildlife detection equipment, expand the use of satellite data to improve wildfire detection and response, and use unmanned aerial vehicles to assess wildland fires.
- Expands the Department of Interior’s slip-on tanker pilot program to include tribes.
- Directs the Joint Fire Science Program to carry out research and development of unmanned aircraft system fire applications.
- Codifies the Burned Area Emergency Response Teams (BAER) to coordinate immediate post-fire emergency erosion control efforts and establishes a new burned area rehabilitation account for medium and long-range fire rehabilitation efforts on National Forest System lands.

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

The Aerial Firefighting Enhancement Act of 2025, [S. 160](#), introduced by Senators Heinrich (D-NM) and Sheehy (R-MT) and cosponsored by three others, would amend the [Wildfire Suppression Aircraft Transfer Act](#), which expired on September 30, 2000. The bill would reauthorize, until 2025, the sale by the Department of Defense of aircraft and parts to the private sector if they are used for the delivery of fire retardant on a wildfire incident. The bill would add delivery of water as an acceptable use of the aircraft and remove the prohibition that the aircraft may not leave the United States unless dispatched through the National Interagency Fire Center and approved in advance and in writing by the Secretaries of Defense and Agriculture. The bill has been referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

[S. 160 Press Release](#)

The Fire Ready Nation Act, [S. 306](#), introduced by Senator Cantwell (D-WA), would establish and maintain a coordinated program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that improves wildfire, fire weather, fire risk, and wildfire smoke-related forecasting, detection, modeling, observations, and service delivery, and for other purposes. The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation considered the bill and reported it to the full Senate for consideration.

[S. 306 Press Release](#)

Fit For Purpose Wildfire Readiness Act, [S. 441](#), introduced by Senators Sheehy (R-MT) and Padilla (D-CA), requires the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to develop a plan to consolidate all existing USDA and DOI federal wildland fire preparedness, suppression, and recovery efforts into a new “National Wildland Firefighting Service” housed within the DOI. The bill does not create this new agency but requires the plan to be outlined in a report to Congress, which must include the following items:

- A proposed budget for the new agency.

- A description of the qualifications for an appointee to lead the agency.
- A description of the resources and authorities needed to complete the consolidation.

The Bill has been referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

The Wildfire Intelligence Collaboration and Coordination Act of 2025, [S. 453](#), introduced by Senator Padilla (D-CA) and cosponsored by Senators Sheehy (R-MT), Daines (R-MT), and Hickenlooper (D-CO) would establish a Wildfire Intelligence Center. The joint office, created between the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of the Interior, would facilitate coordination and information sharing across federal and state departments and agencies, tribal entities, academia, and the private sector on wildland fires. The Bill has been referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

[S. 453 Press Release](#)