



## Legislative & Policy Update – February 2026

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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:

- 2026 Farm Bill
- Representative Newhouse (R-WA) Appointed as Chair of Forestry Subcommittee
- House Committee on Natural Resources, Federal Lands Subcommittee Hearing Recap
- House Passes the *ACERO Act* to Increase NASA's Role in Aerial Firefighting
- *TORCH Act* Introduced to Expand Categorical Exclusions and Increase Grazing for Fuels Management
- *Western Wildfire Support Act* Passes Committee
- *Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act* Passes Committee
- *LIMBER Act* Introduced to Promote Investment in Mass Timber
- Bill Introduced to Waive Post-fire Cost-share Requirements
- Democrats Seek Details on Interior Wildfire Consolidation Plan
- Forest Service Releases New Grant Terms and Conditions
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### Farm Bill Text Released and Markup Planned

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA) has released the text of H.R. 7657, the [Farm, Food and National Security Act of 2026](#) (2026 Farm Bill). The Farm Bill, which covers an array of topics ranging from commodity pricing to forestry, is traditionally enacted every five years. However, we are currently operating under the third extension of the 2018 Farm Bill, with some provisions updated in July 2025 with the enactment of H.R. 1, the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#).

A few forestry highlights from the 2026 Farm Bill include:

- Amends the *Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act* to extend the \$10 million authorization of appropriations for State Forest Action Plans and authorize funds to be used for the implementation of state Forest Action Plans. (Sec. 8101)
- Codifies the Reforestation, Nurseries, and Genetic Resources Program. (Sec. 8305)
- Creates new Categorical Exclusions and enlarges others. (sec. 8401 - 8407)
- Requires the USDA Forest Service to suppress wildfires within 24 hours of detection, as seen in Senator McClintock's (R-CA) [H.R. 178](#). (sec. 8408)

- Includes a Cottonwood Fix, negating the need for the Forest Service to reinitiate endangered species consultation of Forest Plans when new information becomes available. (sec. 8411)
- Amends the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to authorize special districts to retain revenue, allow new permanent road construction, and extend the GNA Revenue provision until 2030. (sec. 8412)
- Establishes a new “Deployment and Testbed Pilot Program for new and innovative wildfire prevention, detection, communication, and mitigation technologies” as seen in Senator Barrasso’s (R-WY) *Wildfire Prevention Act of 2025* ([S.140](#)). (sec 8414)
- Codifies that no court may enjoin the use of aerial fire retardant under the *Clean Water Act*. (sec. 10212)
- Reauthorizes the Wood Innovation Grant Program, reduces the non-federal match, and authorizes grants for hauling hazardous fuels reduction materials to locations that can utilize it. (sec. 8432)

View a [title-by-title summary](#).

In a press release, Thompson stated “a new Farm Bill is long overdue .. I look forward to seeing my colleagues in Congress work together to get this critical legislation across the finish line” but in a [separate statement](#), Ranking Member Angie Craig (D-MN) said the bill is a "shell of a farm bill with poison pills that complicates, if not derails, chances of getting anything done."

A markup was scheduled for February 23, 2026, but has been rescheduled to [March 3, 2026](#), at 5:00 p.m. ET due to a winter storm.

### **Congressman Dan Newhouse (R-WA) Appointed as the New Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture**

On February 12, 2026, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Thompson (R-PA) announced that Representative Dan Newhouse (R-WA) would be the new chairman of the Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture. Newhouse replaces the late Doug LaMalfa, who served as the subcommittee chairman for three years before his passing in January.

In a [press release](#), Thompson stated, “Mr. LaMalfa left big shoes to fill, but I have no doubt in my mind that Rep. Newhouse is the right person to carry on his legacy.” The newly appointed Chairman stated he looks forward to moving a Farm Bill this Congress and that it is an “honor to fill the shoes” of Doug LaMalfa.

### **House Committee on Natural Resources, Federal Lands Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Six Bills**

On February 10, 2026, the House Committee on Natural Resources, Federal Lands subcommittee held a [hearing](#) on six bills, including the following forestry bills:

- H.R. 34, the [Land and Social Security Optimization \(LASSO\) Act](#)
- H.R. 3553, the [Building Resiliency and Understanding of Shrublands to Halt Fires \(BRUSH Fires\) Act](#)

David Lytle, Acting Deputy Chief of Fire and Aviation Management at the Forest Service, provided verbal and [written testimony](#) for the hearing. The testimony documents the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) opposition to the *LASSO Act*, which would direct a portion of Forest Service revenue to the Social Security Trust Fund. This opposition is due to concerns that redirecting funds would reduce funding for Forest Service projects and could conflict with existing statute. The Department voiced support for the *Brush Fires Act*, which would direct the Forest Service to study current wildfire mitigation strategies in shrubland ecosystems and identify strategies that would reduce wildfire risk in these ecosystems.

### **House Passes the ACERO Act to Increase NASA’s Role in Aerial Firefighting**

On February 23, 2026, the House of Representatives unanimously passed H.R. 390, the [Advanced Capabilities for Emergency Response \(ACERO\) Act](#) sponsored by Congressman Vince Fong (R-CA). The bill authorizes NASA's ACERO project to:

- Advance aircraft technologies and airspace management efforts.
- Provide for real-time data exchange for wildfire response teams.
- Develop an interoperable platform to provide situational awareness of aerial assets.
- Establish a “multi-agency concept of operations” for management of airspace during wildfires.
- Create a unified concept of operations for managing airspace during wildfires.

View the [press release](#).

### Targeted Operations to Remove Catastrophic Hazards (TORCH) Introduced in the House

Congressman Mike Kennedy (R-UT) has introduced the [Targeted Operations to Remove Catastrophic Hazards \(TORCH\) Act](#). The bill, originally authored and introduced by the late Doug LaMalfa, would:

- 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.
- Exempt the Forest Service from reconsulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on new species information. (Commonly referred to as the Cottonwood Fix).
- Include 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.

A [press release](#) from Kennedy’s office states, “This legislation honors the legacy of the late Congressman Doug LaMalfa of California and advances critical, common-sense reforms to forest management that will protect Western communities from the devastating impacts of catastrophic wildfires.” In a [supportive letter](#), the National Association of State Foresters notes that streamlining administrative processes for forest management activities on federal lands has important cross-boundary benefits.

### Western Wildfire Support Act Passes Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

On February 2, 2026, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee passed S. 91, the [Western Wildfire Support Act](#), introduced by Senators Tim Sheehy (R-MT) and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV).

The bill generally seeks to improve federal wildland firefighting activities and create greater transparency in wildfire cost accounting.

A few highlights from the 16-part bill include:

- Establishes accounts in the Treasury for addressing wildfires.
- 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 wildfire detection equipment, expand the use of satellite data to improve wildfire detection and response, and use unmanned aerial vehicles to assess wildland fires.
- Permanently authorizes a program to award grants to eligible states or units of local government to acquire slip-on tanks.
- 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.

Congressman Joe Neguse (D-CO) has introduced [companion legislation](#) in the House, where it has been referred to five committees.

### **Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act Passes House Natural Resources Committee**

On February 11, 2026, the House Committee on Natural Resources passed H.R. 3922, the [Cross-Boundary Wildfire Solutions Act](#), introduced by Congressman Neguse (D-CO).

The Senate version, [S. 2033](#), introduced by Senator Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), passed the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in December.

The two companion bills would direct the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study and provide Congress with a report identifying federal programs, rules, and authorities that enable or inhibit cross-boundary wildfire mitigation work, and whether changes to any program, rule, or authority could increase capacity or funding for cross-boundary wildfire mitigation.

### **Leveraging Investment in Mass Building and Employment with Renewable (LIMBER) Timber Act**

Congresswoman Janelle Bynum (D-OR) has introduced H.R. 7245, the *Leveraging Investment in Mass Building and Employment With Renewable Timber (LIMBER) Act*. [The bill](#) seeks to promote investment in the U.S. mass timber industry through a set of federal tax incentives for mass timber plant investment, mass timber workforce development, and the use of mass timber in construction.

The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

### **Bill Introduced to Waive Post-fire Cost-share Requirements**

H.R. 7007, the [Governing for the People Act](#), is a large bill with provisions ranging from fraud protection for veterans to tax incentives for film and television productions to post-fire recovery. Section 302 would authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to waive cost-share for post-fire recovery on fires that are "the result of management activities conducted by the Secretary on National Forest System land."

The text is the same as the *Responsible Wildland Fire Recovery Act*, [H.R. 5963](#), introduced by Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez (D-NM) in the House, and [S. 3149](#), introduced by Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM) in the Senate.

### **Democrats Seek Details on Interior Wildfire Consolidation Plan**

*(courtesy of Grace Hogue, NASF)*

Eleven Democratic lawmakers, including Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Chellie Pingree (D-ME), and Michael Bennet (D-CO), are pressing Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Doug Burgum for details on his plan to consolidate federal wildfire programs into a new U.S. Wildland Fire Service. In a letter, they asked how DOI is coordinating with state and local governments, how jurisdiction over federal resources would be structured, and whether Congress will have oversight before implementation.

Lawmakers warned the restructuring could divert resources from land management agencies, particularly the Bureau of Land Management, and disrupt day-to-day firefighting operations. They also argued that Burgum lacks the authority to transfer Forest Service firefighting functions without congressional approval.

Read the letter [here](#).

### **Forest Service Releases New Grant Terms and Conditions**

The Forest Service has instituted new Grant Terms and Conditions. These are outlined in three specific publications in addition to the USDA General Terms and Conditions.

- [Forest Service Federal Financial Assistance General Terms and Conditions](#)

- [Forest Service Mutual Interest Agreement General Terms and Conditions](#)
- [Forest Service Research and Development General Terms and Conditions](#)
- [USDA General Terms and Conditions](#)

The new terms and conditions became effective on February 14, 2026.

#### **Notice of Funding Opportunity for Slip-on Tanker Program**

DOI announced that \$20 million is available for the Slip-on Tanker Pilot Program. A [DOI press release](#) describes that funding is available for local governments to purchase slip-on tanker units to convert trucks, utility vehicles, and other vehicles to wildland fire engines. Grant amounts may range from \$10,000.00 to \$249,000.00. To be eligible, the local government applicant must provide emergency services to a population of less than 50,000 and serve communities with moderate to high wildfire risk.

The deadline to apply is March 23, 2026. More information on the program and how to apply can be found on [Grants.gov](#).

#### **Notice of Funding Opportunity for Wood Innovations Grants**

The Forest Service has [announced](#) up to \$95 million in competitive grant funding for the Wood Innovations, Community Wood, and Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance Grant programs.

These programs generally support projects that:

- Develop innovative wood products
- Increase the use of wood in commercial and residential construction
- Expand wood energy systems
- Modernize, retrofit, or increase the capacity of wood products manufacturing facilities

Eligible applicants include for-profit entities, not-for-profit entities, state and local governments, tribes, higher education institutions, and special districts.

The deadline to apply for these grants is April 22, 2026. You can find more information and how to apply to each grant on the [Wood Innovations Program webpage](#).