



Legislative & Policy Update – November 2025

Published November 12, 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:

- Senate Passes Bill to End the Federal Government Shutdown
- Senate Stewardship Caucus Formed
- Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act of 2025
- EPA Issues Renewed Guidance on Prescribed Fire Smoke
- Border Lands Conservation Act

November 13, 2025 Update

As expected, late in the evening of November 12, the House of Representatives passed and President Trump signed a bill to end the federal government shutdown. [H.R. 5371, the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026](#). The legislation includes a continuing resolution to fund most federal agencies until January 30, 2026, and fiscal year 2026 appropriations bills for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Legislative Branch, and the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. It also reauthorizes the 2018 Farm Bill through September 20, 2026 (sec. 5002)

The included USDA appropriations bill maintains core USDA programs, including \$850 million for the Natural Resources and Conservation Service Technical and Financial Assistance Programs. It also maintains the status quo of funding the Forest Service in the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, rather than the USDA appropriations bill, so the Forest Service and DOI will be operating under a continuing resolution until Congress passes a FY 26 Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

The bill contains other notable items, including:

- Requires the reimbursement to states and other grantees for the use of their own non-federal funds to continue carrying out federal programs during the shutdown (Sec 118).
- Blocks the use of federal funds to implement a reduction in force until January 30, 2026 (Sec. 120(a))
- Reinstates federal employees for whom a reduction in force was "proposed, noticed, initiated, or executed" between October 1, 2025, and November 12, 2025 (Sec. 120 (e))

- Waives the firefighter paycap through calendar year 2026 (Sec. 151)
- Maintains the wildfire funding fix (Sec. 152)

Senate Passes Bill to End the Federal Government Shutdown

On November 10, 2025, the Senate passed a bill to end the federal government shutdown. The bill, which was forged out a negotiations by eight Senate Democrats, Republicans, and President Trump, passed by a vote of 60-40 with eight Democrats voting for the bill. The legislation includes a Continuing Resolution for most agencies until January 30, 2026, and a minibus to fund the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Legislative Branch, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. As of this writing, it is unclear whether the Senate has included the full [USDA appropriations bill](#) or just selected portions of it. It is also unclear whether the Senate has included Forest Service funding, which is typically part of the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Information on fiscal year 2026 funding levels proposed by the House and Senate can be found in the [August 2025 policy update](#).

A vote is scheduled in the House of Representatives for 4:00 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday, November 11, 2025. You can watch floor proceedings and track House schedules and activity at <https://live.house.gov/>.

Senate Stewardship Caucus Formed

U.S. Senators Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and Tim Sheehy (R-MT) launched the [Senate Stewardship Caucus](#) at an event hosted by the organization Nature is Nonpartisan.

According to a press release from [Senator Sheehy](#), the Caucus “aims to drive bipartisan efforts to protect and expand access to public lands, promote commonsense land management policies, and support economic growth in rural communities.” [Senator Heinrich's](#) press release states the purpose of the Caucus is to “advance bipartisan efforts aimed at protecting and expanding access to public lands and waters, recovering wildlife, and restoring habitat.”

Senators Heinrich and Sheehy will co-chair the Caucus. Additional inaugural members of the Senate Stewardship Caucus include U.S. Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Thom Tillis (R-NC), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Steve Daines (R-MT), Chris Coons (D-DE), and Katie Britt (R-AL).

Senator John Curtis Introduces the Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act of 2025

Senator John Curtis (R-UT), along with co-sponsor Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), introduced S. 3044, the [Wildfire Emissions Prevention Act of 2025](#) (WEPA). WEPA would amend the Clean Air Act to clarify that prescribed fires are exceptional events. The bill also directs the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to consult with federal land managers, state air pollution control agencies, State Foresters, and state fish and wildlife agencies in an effort to revise existing regulations to focus on state implementation responsibility.

Prior to the bill’s introduction, Georgia State Forester Johnny Sabo offered supportive testimony at a [Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works business meeting](#).

EPA Issues Renewed Guidance on Prescribed Fire Smoke

On October 16, 2025, EPA Assistant Administrator Aaron Szabo issued a policy [guidance memo](#) to Regional Administrators and Deputy Regional Administrators declaring the “policy of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that any regulatory provisions that would limit strategic deployment of prescribed fire should not be included in Clean Air Act (CAA) State Implementation Plans (SIPs) as part of the control strategies for attainment or maintenance of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), or to satisfy regional haze program requirements.”

The memo discusses the importance of prescribed fire as a mitigation tool in protecting communities and natural resources from catastrophic fire and clearly outlines that prescribed fires are eligible for treatment as exceptional events, meaning air quality data influenced by prescribed fires can be excluded from “certain regulatory decisions regarding attainment and maintenance of the NAAQS.” The memo directs Regional Administrators to ensure SIPs that are under review do not include any provisions that could limit the application of prescribed fire.

The memo closes with a statement that “EPA is committed to continuing to collaborate with local, state, Tribal, and Federal partners to support the use of wildland prescribed fire.”

Senator Mike Lee Introduces the Border Lands Conservation Act

Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, has introduced S. 2967, the [Border lands Conservation Act](#).

According to a [press release and bill summary](#), the bill:

- “Requires DOI and FS to work with DHS to inventory existing roads and install navigable road infrastructure to deter illegal southern or northern border entry and to gain operational control of the border;
- Amends the Wilderness Act to authorize DHS to conduct necessary operations in wilderness areas to secure the border;
- Requires an inventory by DOI and FS of all roads and trails created by illegal immigration and then subsequently requires DOI and FS to work with DHS to use these roads to deter illegal entry into the United States and gain operational control of the southern and northern border;
- Establishes the Border Fuels Management Initiative to address the risk of wildland fire along the southern and northern border;
- Requires DOI, FS, and GAO to report on visitor safety issues and loss of access to federal land due to illegal immigration;
- Prohibits the Biden Administration practice of housing illegal immigrants on Federal lands.”

The bill has been referred to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and is co-sponsored by eight Republicans.