



WESTERN FORESTRY LEADERSHIP COALITION

LEGISLATIVE & POLICY UPDATE

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The *Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC) Legislative & Policy Update* provides information on issues of importance to the WFLC and our partner groups. This document is posted at www.wflcweb.org/infomaterials/issue_briefs.php. Please note that the items below highlight only a few of the issues the WFLC is currently tracking.

1. FY 2011 Appropriations

The appropriations process is behind schedule this year and a strong likelihood remains that a Continuing Resolution (CR) will be used to continue funding federal programs for at least the first quarter of FY 2011. The Council of Western State Forester's (CWSF) FY 2011 Appropriations Priorities, including specific funding recommendations, are available online at http://wflcenter.org/infomaterials/issue_briefs.php.

Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations: The Senate has approved an overall budget allocation for FY 2011 that cuts spending by \$14 billion from the President's proposed budget, however the Senate Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies has not held a markup of an FY 2011 spending bill. In the House, the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies approved a spending bill, although the full House Committee on Appropriations has not yet considered the bill. The text of the bill approved by the House Subcommittee has not been released, so program specific funding levels are not available. The Subcommittee did fund the accounts contemplated under the *Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act (FLAME Act)*. The FLAME accounts are to be used for wildland fire suppression expenses that meet access criteria under the Act. The accounts are designed to address up-front budget constraints related to rising fire suppression costs and eliminate the need for the Forest Service and Department of Interior fire agencies to transfer funds from non-fire programs. Including the FLAME accounts, overall suppression funding in the House Subcommittee was set at the ten-year average, adjusted for inflation. It is unclear when the full House Committee on Appropriations will consider the Interior and Related Agencies bill.

Agriculture Appropriations: Appropriations subcommittees in both the House and Senate have approved Agriculture spending bills; however neither full appropriations committee in the House or Senate has weighed in on the bills. During the Subcommittee hearing in the House, numerous amendments were offered that would have cut overall spending in the bill, however these amendments were ultimately rejected and funding levels for conservation programs in the Agriculture spending bill such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program appear to have survived relatively unscathed.

2. USDA Forest Service Planning Rule

On July 29th and 30th, the USDA Forest Service (USFS) held the Fourth National Roundtable on the Forest Service Planning Rule in Washington, DC. The purpose of this meeting was to present the concepts and approaches being developed by the USFS Planning Rule Team to interested stakeholders for their review and comment. Tony Tooke, Director of Ecosystem Management Coordination with the USFS, led the plenary sessions and provided an overview of the proposed framework for the Planning Rule. Prior to the meeting, the USFS provided a Draft Planning Rule Framework along with posts on how the rule might address Collaboration, Monitoring, People and the Environment, Recreation, All Lands, Climate Change and Watersheds on the Planning Rule Blog (<http://planningrule.blogs.usda.gov/>).

At the roundtable, USFS Chief Tom Tidwell discussed the importance of creating a rule that is both adaptable and science based, and further focused on the importance of stakeholder involvement and direction in developing the rule. The basic framework proposed by the USFS Planning Rule Team would follow an iterative three step process of (1) Assess, (2) Revise or Amend, and (3) Monitor. The Planning Rule Team expects to release a proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement before the end of 2010 and ultimately believes they are still on track to complete the rule and environmental impact statement in November of 2011.

The CWSF has been following the work of the USFS Planning Rule Team and developed *Key Principles Guiding State Forester Engagement in Drafting the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule* (available at http://wflccenter.org/infomaterials/issue_briefs.php) to guide and inform CWSF interaction on the planning rule. These principles were shared with the USFS Planning Rule team at the Fourth National Roundtable and on the planning rule blog.

Materials from the Fourth National Roundtable are available on the Planning Rule Website at <http://planningrule.blogs.usda.gov/files/2010/07/FourthRoundtableMeetingMaterials.pdf>.

3. National Forest Insect and Disease Emergency Act of 2010

On August 5, 2010, the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources approved a number of energy and public lands bills, including the *National Forest Insect and Disease Emergency Act of 2010* (S. 2798). These bills are now eligible for consideration by the full Senate, however it is not clear when or if the entire body will take up any of these bills, or if they will include them in an omnibus package once the Senate reconvenes in September.

The CWSF has been monitoring this bill and will work with partners and staff as necessary to address concerns with the current language. Of primary interest to the CWSF are the changes to the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) in S. 2798 as approved by the Committee. While the language of the amended and approved bill would expand the GNA to additional western states, it would also significantly reduce the utility of the authority.

The GNA is currently available in Colorado and Utah and enables these states to enter into agreements with the USDA Forest Service to implement management activities on federal lands. The GNA provides flexibility to land managers and is an effective tool in addressing forest health and community safety issues across management boundaries.

4. 2012 Farm Bill

Both the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry have already begun holding hearings to review programs in preparation for the 2012 Farm Bill. As discussion of the 2012 Farm Bill continues, the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition may reconvene. This group worked to increase opportunities for America's private forest landowners to provide economic and environmental benefits to the larger society in the 2008 Farm Bill. Additionally, the CWSF is working on a Farm Bill platform based around the recommendations in the WFLC *Threats to Western Private Forests: A Framework for Conserving and Enhancing the Benefits from Private Working Forests in the Western U.S.* The *Threats to Western Private Forests* report is available at <http://www.wflcweb.org/forestthreats/>.

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