

Bipartisan – Bicameral Wildfire Funding and Management Amendment Summary

As wildfires continue to grow more expensive to fight, fire suppression is devouring the U.S. Forest Service budget and crowding out funding for recreation, habitat restoration, and even fire prevention projects. If this trend is left unchecked, USFS projects that more than two-thirds of the agency's budget will be devoted to wildfire spending within a decade.

The bipartisan - bicameral language will:

1. **Permanently end fire borrowing**, so federal agencies no longer have to steal from fire prevention and other programs when wildfire costs exceed projections.
2. **Stop the Forest Service from becoming the Fire Service**, by treating the largest wildfires as the natural disasters they are and funding those operations from an emergency account.
3. **Encourage fire prevention, clean water protection and habitat management projects**, by speeding up federal reviews for certain projects that are recommended by collaborative groups.

Fire Funding

- Treats the largest and most destructive fires, which represent just 1 percent of all fires yet use up 30% of the fire budget annually, as the natural disasters that they are
- Allows agencies to draw funding from a new Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund, which will be funded through the same mechanism that funds Federal response to other natural disasters.
- Frees up roughly \$300 million in funding for forest management, fire prevention, and other agency activities.

Forest Management

- New NEPA authority allows study of Action/No Action alternatives under NEPA, reducing the cost and time of federal review.
- Categorical exclusions to reduce hazardous fuels, address wildfire risks in the wildland-urban interface, or to protect clean drinking water within 100 miles of a municipality, for projects recommended by a collaborative:
 - o Limited to 3,000 acres.
- Categorical exclusions for early seral stand management, for projects recommended by a collaborative:
 - o Implemented in small units to mimic the natural, varied forest conditions that are beneficial to wildlife.
 - o Limited to 250 acres.
- Sideboards to the new forest management authorities include:

- Must be recommended by collaboratives, which must include scientists, conservationists, land managers, local government, tribes and industry, among others
- protecting old growth and large trees where appropriate
- no new roads, clean up temporary roads, and no work in roadless areas
- requiring the use of the best available science
- public notice on projects
- must comply with the relevant forest plan, and
- must comply federal environmental laws including the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act.

Additional Provisions

- Permanently authorizes the FOREST SERVICE LEGACY ROADS AND TRAILS REMEDIATION PROGRAM to carry out critical maintenance and urgent repairs and improvements on National Forest System roads, trails, and bridges; to restore fish and other aquatic organism passage by removing or replacing unnatural barriers to the passage of fish and other aquatic organisms; to decommission unneeded roads and trails;
- Added RESTORING AMERICA’S WATERSHEDS ACT OF 2015 requiring the Forest Service to establish and maintain a Water Source Protection Program to protect clean water west of the Mississippi. The agency may enter into water source investment partnerships with end water users (including States, political subdivisions, Indian tribes, utilities, municipal water systems, irrigation districts, nonprofit organizations, and corporations) to protect and restore the condition of National Forest watersheds that provide water to the non-Federal partners.
- STATE SUPPORTED FUNDING OF FOREST MANAGEMENT creates an account into which states can deposit funds to support collaboratives, resource advisory committees, cover a community wildfire protection plan, or other activities carried out through agreements with the Secretary.