



Forest Service: FY2016 Discretionary Appropriations

The Forest Service (FS) is responsible for managing 193 million acres of land in the National Forest System (NFS), conducting forestry research, and providing assistance to state, local, private, and international forest owners. FS is an agency within the Department of Agriculture, yet it receives discretionary appropriations through the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

For FY2016, total FS discretionary appropriations were \$6.364 billion. This total includes \$5.664 billion provided in P.L. 114-113 (FY2016 omnibus law) and \$0.700 billion provided in P.L. 114-53 (FY2016 continuing resolution) and designated as emergency funding. In total, the FY2016 discretionary appropriations were 25.9% higher than the FY2015 appropriations of \$5.056 billion. For FY2017, FS has requested \$5.757 billion, 10% less than the FY2016 enacted appropriations. Much of the fluctuation in FS appropriations can be attributed to costs associated with wildland fire management.

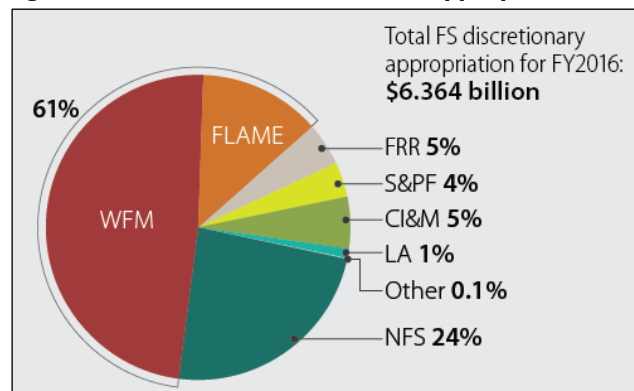
FS Discretionary Appropriations

FS discretionary appropriations were in seven main accounts for FY2016 (see **Table 1** and **Figure 1**). The largest share—a combined 61%—went to two accounts: the Wildland Fire Management (WFM) and FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund accounts. The WFM account funds activities related to the management of unplanned and unwanted fires, including planning for and suppression of wildfires. The FLAME account funds emergency wildfire suppression activities. The FLAME account received

substantially more funding in FY2016, an increase of nearly \$400.0 million from the average appropriation since FY2010. Most of the increase in the WFM account in FY2016 can be attributed to the \$700.0 million provided as emergency funding.

The next-largest amount—24% of the total—went to the NFS account, which funds activities related to the management of the national forests and grasslands. The largest program within the NFS account, Forest Products, funds timber sale planning and implementation and received \$359.8 million in FY2016.

Figure 1. Share of Total FS FY2016 Appropriations



Source: P.L. 114-53.

Notes: See Table 1 for account abbreviations.

Table 1. Forest Service (FS) Discretionary Appropriations by Account

Account	FY2015 Enacted (\$ in millions)	FY2016 Enacted (\$ in millions)	% Change from FY2015	FY2017 Request (\$ in millions)
Forest and Rangeland Research (FRR)	\$296.0	\$291.0	-1.7%	\$292.0
State and Private Forestry (SPF)	232.7	237.0	1.9%	234.0
National Forest Management (NFS)	1,494.3	1,509.4	1.0%	1,501.0
Capital Improvement & Maintenance (CIM)	343.4	348.2	1.4%	343.3
Land Acquisition (LA) ^a	48.7	64.6	32.7%	66.8
Wildland Fire Management (WFM) ^b	2,333.3	3,086.3	32.3%	3,315.5
FLAME	303.1	823.0	171.6%	0
Other ^c	4.9	4.9	0.0%	4.8
Total	5,056.2	6,364.3	25.9%	5,757.4

Source: House Appropriations Committee detailed funding tables for FS; P.L. 114-133 Division G, Explanatory Statement, *Congressional Record*, December 17, 2015, p. H10221; FS FY2017 Budget Justification.

- This figure includes appropriations to the LA account and appropriations to two smaller accounts for related land acquisition activities: appropriations for special act land acquisitions and to complete land exchanges.
- This figure includes supplemental or emergency funds provided outside of discretionary spending limits, such as the \$700 million designated as emergency funding for wildfire suppression in P.L. 114-53 and the \$864.1 million FS is requesting in FY2017.
- In addition to the larger accounts listed, FS receives appropriations to several relatively small accounts, such as appropriations for the range betterment fund; gifts, donations, and bequests for research; and management of national forest lands for subsistence uses.

The remaining accounts all received 5% or less of the total appropriations:

- The Forest and Rangeland Research (FRR) account received 5% of the total appropriations. It funds research and development efforts to provide scientific information and new technologies to support sustainable forest and rangeland management.
- The Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CI&M) account also received 5% of the total. It funds FS efforts to provide and maintain facilities, roads, trails, and other infrastructure needs.
- The State and Private Forestry (S&PF) account received 4% of the total appropriations. It funds programs to provide assistance to nonfederal forest owners and to protect forests from insects, diseases, and invasive plants. Included in this account is the Forest Legacy Program, a cost-share grant program that receives appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF; 54 U.S.C. §§200301 et seq.).
- The Land Acquisition (LA) account received 1% of the total, which includes funds derived from the LWCF as well as two smaller appropriations accounts, and allows FS to acquire lands for conservation or ownership consolidation purposes.

FY2017 Budget Request

The Administration requests \$5.757 billion in discretionary appropriations for FS in FY2017. This request is \$40.0 million below the FY2016 request and \$606.9 million below the FY2016 enacted discretionary appropriations.

The FY2017 request continues a proposal to establish a new funding mechanism for wildfire suppression activities, which includes eliminating the FLAME reserve account. Therefore, FS did not request appropriations to the FLAME reserve account. For FY2017, FS is requesting \$2.451 billion for WFM and up to \$864.1 million to be available upon request for emergency suppression operations (for a total of \$3.315 billion). As part of the proposal, the \$864.1 million for emergency suppression operations would be provided outside of statutory and procedural constraints on discretionary spending. Similar legislative proposals have been introduced in the 114th Congress (H.R. 167 and S. 235).

Issues in FS Appropriations

FS discretionary appropriations increased in FY2016, although funds provided for wildfire management (supplemental and regular appropriations) are responsible for much of the observed differences. Funding for wildfire management activities accounts for an increasing percentage of agency appropriations, which may raise questions about the amount of funding necessary to adequately address wildland fire management issues or about the extent to which wildfire management activities direct agency resources—financial and otherwise—away from other FS statutory obligations.

Wildland Fire Management Funding

The cost of wildland fire management—for both FS and the Department of the Interior—continues to be a concern for Congress. Wildfire spending has tripled since the 1990s, increasing from \$1.6 billion combined in FY1994 to \$4.9 billion in FY2016 (\$3.9 billion for FS alone). A significant portion of that increase is related to rising suppression costs, even during years of relatively mild wildfire activity, although the costs vary annually and are difficult to predict in advance.

If the suppression funding in both the WFM and FLAME accounts is exhausted during any given fiscal year, FS is authorized to transfer funds from other accounts to pay for suppression activities, called fire transfers. Since FY2010, there have been three years in which FS has required more suppression funds than were appropriated for that purpose, leading FS to transfer funds from other accounts and prompting concerns that the increasing suppression spending may be coming at the expense of other agency programs.

Congress has enacted supplemental appropriations to repay the transferred funds or to replenish the agency's suppression accounts, most recently in P.L. 114-53, to repay \$700.0 million borrowed during the 2015 wildfire season. The \$700.0 million was designated as emergency funds, not subject to the statutory and procedural limits on discretionary spending, although Congress has not always waived those controls for supplemental wildfire spending. This has prompted some to explore options to provide certain wildfire funding outside of those constraints.

The 114th Congress is considering options to address wildfire suppression spending issues, which include

- what level to appropriate for suppression activities;
- how to provide for unpredictable costs quickly;
- where the funding should come from; and
- whether suppression funding should be subject to or outside of discretionary spending limits.

Four bills—S. 235, H.R. 167, S. 508, and H.R. 2647—have been introduced to address these issues.

For More Information/CRS Reports

CRS Report R43417, *Forest Service Appropriations: Five-Year Data and Trends and FY2017 Budget Request*

CRS Report R44082, *Wildfire Spending: Background, Issues, and Legislation in the 114th Congress*

CRS Report R43872, *National Forest System Management: Overview, Appropriations, and Issues for Congress*

CRS Report R44061, *Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies: FY2016 Appropriations*

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