

September 1, 2020

Forest Service: FY2021 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, but it receives discretionary appropriations through the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

For FY2020, Congress appropriated \$7.504 billion in total FY2020 discretionary appropriations for FS, including \$5.483 billion in regular funding (P.L. 116-94); \$70.8 million in emergency-designated supplemental funding to address issues related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (P.L. 116-136); and \$1.950 billion pursuant to the *wildfire adjustment* (P.L. 116-94), discussed below. For more information on FY2020 appropriations, see CRS In Focus IF11416, *Forest Service: FY2019 and FY2020 Appropriations*.

FY2021 Discretionary Appropriations

Budget Request

The Trump Administration requested \$5.345 billion in FY2021 discretionary appropriations for FS, not including the wildfire adjustment. This would be a decrease of \$138.6 million (-3%) from the regular-enacted appropriations for FY2020 and a decrease of \$209.4 million (-4%) from the FY2020 total enacted figure. The Administration also requested an additional \$2.040 billion through the wildfire

adjustment, for a total request of \$7.385 billion. The request reflected increases for some FS accounts and decreases for others, including no funding for one account (see **Table 1**).

FY2021 Discretionary Appropriations

The House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 7612 on July 14, 2020. The measure was incorporated into Division C of H.R. 7608, which passed the House on July 24, 2020. Not including the wildfire adjustment, the House-passed bill would provide \$5.517 billion for FS, an increase of \$33.3 million (+1%) from the regular-enacted appropriation for FY2020 and a decrease of \$37.5 million (-1%) from the FY2020 total enacted figure. The bill would provide \$171.9 million (+3%) more than the Administration-requested amount. The bill also would provide an additional \$2.040 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, for a total of \$7.557 billion. The bill specified that appropriations to most FS accounts are to remain available through FY2024.

Forest Service Appropriation Accounts

FS has six primary discretionary appropriations accounts, discussed below, generally in order of decreasing funding. In addition to those six accounts, FS has several other relatively small accounts. These accounts are combined into an “Other” category for this report.

Table 1. Forest Service (FS) Discretionary Appropriations, by Account (\$ in millions)

Account	FY2020			FY2021	
	Regular	Suppl.	Total	Requested	House-passed H.R. 7608
Forest and Rangeland Research (FRR)	\$305.0	\$3.0	\$308.0	\$249.3	\$311.8
State and Private Forestry (SPF)	347.0	—	347.0	217.4	300.3
National Forest System (NFS)	1,957.5	34.0	1,991.5	2,005.1	2,062.4
Capital Improvement & Maintenance (CIM)	440.0	26.8	466.8	453.2	451.2
Land Acquisition (LA)	76.9	—	76.9	0	0
Wildland Fire Management (WFM)	2,350.6	7.0	2,357.6	2,409.4	2,385.6
Wildfire Adjustment	1,950.0	—	1,950.0	2,040.0	2,040.0
Total WFM	4,300.6	7.0	4,307.6	4,449.4	4,425.6
Other ^a	6.4	—	6.4	10.4	5.4
Total, without wildfire adjustment	5,483.4	70.8	5,554.2	5,344.8	5,516.7
Total, with wildfire adjustment	7,433.4	70.8	7,504.2	7,384.8	7,556.7

Sources: P.L. 116-94 Division D; P.L. 116-136 Title VII; FY2021 FS Budget Justification; and H.R. 7608.

Notes: Suppl. = supplemental appropriations. Figures reflect rescissions and deferrals. Column totals may not add due to rounding.

- a. This row includes total appropriations for several small accounts, including specified land acquisitions; Range Betterment Fund; gifts, donations, and bequests for research; management of lands for subsistence uses; and communication site administration.

Wildland Fire Management

The largest share of FS appropriations generally goes to the Wildland Fire Management (WFM) account. The WFM appropriation funds two programs: preparedness and suppression. Appropriations for preparedness are used to support efforts that assist with fire prevention and detection, equipment, training, and baseline personnel. Appropriations for suppression are used primarily for wildfire response. This includes firefighter salaries, aviation asset operations, and incident support functions, as well as personnel and resources for post-fire analysis and recovery.

Prior to FY2018, however, WFM included funding for programs such as Hazardous Fuels, Cooperative Fire Assistance, and fire science and research. Starting in FY2018, these programs have been funded through other accounts, as described below. In addition, FS used to receive appropriations for suppression purposes to the FLAME wildfire suppression reserve account. FY2018 was the last year the FLAME account received appropriations.

Wildfire Adjustment/Wildfire Funding Fix

Starting in FY2020, additional funds for suppression operations are available to FS (and the Department of the Interior) pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, a budgetary mechanism established in P.L. 115-141 (Division O, §102(a)), commonly referred to as the *wildfire funding fix*. This mechanism allows Congress to provide additional funding above a specified baseline for wildfire suppression through an adjustment to the discretionary spending limit. The baseline is the 10-year suppression obligation average, as reported in FY2015 (\$1.011 billion for FS). The maximum amount available pursuant to the adjustment starts at \$1.950 billion for FS in FY2020 and increases annually. The wildfire adjustment is available from FY2020 through FY2027, although the statutory limits for discretionary spending are currently in effect through FY2021.

National Forest System

The National Forest System (NFS) account funds activities related to the management of the national forests and grasslands, including planning, recreation, grazing, timber production, watershed, wildlife, and law enforcement, among other activities. Starting in FY2018, funding for the Hazardous Fuels program has been provided through the NFS account.

Capital Improvement and Maintenance

The Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CIM) account funds FS efforts to provide and maintain facilities, roads, trails, and other infrastructure needs across the national forest system. This includes funding to address a backlog of deferred maintenance (DM). Starting in FY2021, FS is set to receive additional funding to address DM through a new mandatory fund established by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152).

State and Private Forestry

The State and Private Forestry (SPF) account funds programs to provide assistance to nonfederal forest owners to protect forests from wildfires, insects, diseases, and invasive plants. In FY2020, SPF included funding for the

Forest Legacy Program (FLP), a cost-share grant program that received discretionary appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF; 54 U.S.C. § 200301 et seq.). The GAOA made the LWCF mandatory spending. The House-passed bill did not include funding for FLP, with the expectation of mandatory funding under the GAOA starting in FY2021.

Forest and Rangeland Research

The Forest and Rangeland Research (FRR) account funds research and development efforts to provide scientific information and new technologies to support sustainable forest and rangeland management. FRR funds the Forest Inventory and Analysis program, which is a continuous census of the forest resources throughout the United States.

Land Acquisition

In FY2020, the Land Acquisition (LA) account received funds derived from the LWCF for FS to acquire lands for conservation or ownership consolidation, among other purposes. The House-passed bill did not include funding for LA, with the expectation of mandatory funding under the GAOA starting in FY2021.

Other

Other includes several smaller appropriations accounts for specified land acquisition activities; the Range Betterment Fund; gifts, donations, and bequests for research; management of national forest lands for subsistence uses; and, beginning FY2020, communication site administration.

Forest Service Budget Restructuring

In response to congressional direction to improve FS accounting, budgeting, and management practices, the Administration requested a budgetary restructuring in FY2020 to establish a FS general management appropriations account. This account would have replaced FS's practice of using *cost pools* from each account to pay for certain fixed costs and administrative expenses. Both the House- and Senate-passed versions of the FY2020 Interior appropriations bill would have established a Forest Service Operations (FSO) account. The FY2020 appropriations law directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an FSO account no later than October 1, 2020, and to submit a report to the House Appropriations Committees no later than November 1, 2020, detailing the account adjustments (P.L. 116-94, Division D, §435).

For FY2021, the House Appropriations Committee indicated continued support for the restructuring (H.Rept. 116-448) but noted that there was not sufficient information to implement the changes at the time of consideration of the FY2021 appropriations.

In addition to this restructuring, the FS budget structure has changed other times, including in FY2018. These changes may improve congressional oversight moving forward but may make examining funding trends over time more challenging.

Katie Hoover, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

IF11638

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.