



November 18, 2021

Funding for Wildfire Management: FY2022 Appropriations for Forest Service and the Department of the Interior

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service (FS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) are responsible for wildfire response and management across the federal lands within their respective jurisdictions. Both FS and DOI generally receive annual discretionary appropriations for wildfire management activities through Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations laws. Wildfire management funding for DOI is provided to the department-level Office of Wildland Fire. Wildfire management appropriations fluctuate annually but rose markedly after FY2000 (see **Figure 1**). For historical funding, see CRS Report R46583, *Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020)*.

FY2022 Budget Request

The Biden Administration requested a total of \$6.072 billion in FY2022 discretionary appropriations for wildfire purposes for FS and DOI (see **Table 1**), which would be a \$529.2 million (10%) increase from FY2021 enacted appropriations. The request included \$3.208 billion in the agencies’ Wildland Fire Management (WFM) accounts, \$2.450 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment (discussed later), and \$413.8 million to other FS accounts for wildfire purposes.

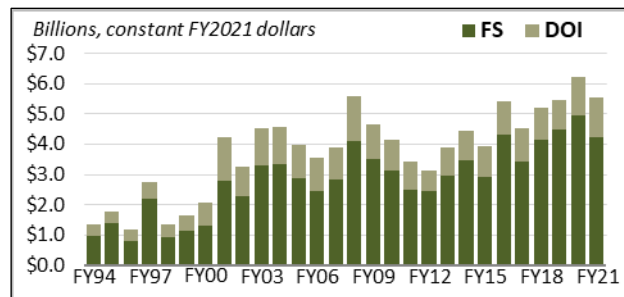
FY2022 Legislative Activity

On July 29, 2021, the House passed H.R. 4502, an omnibus appropriations measure with funding in Division E for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The House-passed measure would provide \$6.080 billion combined for FS and DOI wildfire purposes for FY2022. On October 18, 2021, the Senate Appropriations Committee released a majority draft bill containing \$6.128 in FY2022 appropriations for FS and DOI wildfire purposes (later introduced as S. 3034). See **Table 1** for House and Senate funding levels.

Regular FY2022 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year. A continuing resolution (CR) provided funding at the FY2021 levels through December 3, 2021 (P.L. 117-43, Division A).

To date, Congress has provided \$1.681 billion in FY2022 supplemental appropriations to DOI and FS for wildfire purposes through two laws: \$450.0 million in Division B of the CR (P.L. 117-43) and \$1.231 billion in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58). It is possible that more of the supplemental funds provided in both laws have been or will be allocated to fire purposes.

Figure 1. FS and DOI Wildfire Appropriations, FY1994-FY2021



Source: CRS.

Notes: DOI = Department of the Interior; FS = Forest Service. Figures are adjusted to constant dollars using the Office of Management and Budget’s GDP Chained Price Index.

Wildfire Accounts and Activities

FS and DOI each have a WFM account. Prior to FY2021, funding for wildfire management generally fell into the following categories: preparedness, suppression, fuel reduction, and other wildfire activities (e.g., site rehabilitation, assistance programs, research, facilities maintenance). Starting in FY2021, however, FS funds the salaries and expenses related to these activities as a separate budget line item in its WFM account. FS also receives appropriations for fuel reduction and other wildfire purposes through other agency appropriations accounts.

Starting in FY2020, FS and DOI receive additional funding for suppression through the *wildfire adjustment* (2 U.S.C. §901(b)(2)(F), also known as the *wildfire funding fix*), a budgetary mechanism that allows for an upward adjustment of the discretionary spending limits to accommodate a specific amount of additional funding for suppression. These additional funds essentially are exempt from the spending limits. A precondition for using the adjustment is that Congress must appropriate a baseline amount of funding within the limits. The baseline is equal to the 10-year suppression obligation average as reported in FY2015 (\$1.011 billion for FS and \$383.7 million for DOI). In FY2021, Congress appropriated the baseline suppression funds to the agencies’ respective WFM accounts and appropriated the funds provided through the wildfire adjustment to a separate account. The wildfire adjustment is available annually through FY2027, and the maximum amount available under the adjustment increases annually.

Table I. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations (\$ in millions)

Account	FY2022				
	FY2021	Requested	H.R. 4502	S. Comm. Maj. Draft	Enacted Suppl.
FS, Total	\$4,240.1	\$4,631.4	\$4,637.0	\$4,672.6	\$1,173.6
WFM, Total	1,927.2	2,097.6	2,098.6	2,097.6	552.2
WFM Salaries and Expenses	764.2	894.6	894.6	894.6	—
WFM Preparedness	152.0	192.0	192.0	192.0	—
WFM Suppression	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	—
WFM Unallocated	—	—	1.0	—	552.2
Wildfire Adjustment	2,040.0	2,120.0	2,120.0	2,120.0	—
NFS Hazardous Fuels	180.4	321.4	323.4	360.0	277.8
SPF Cooperative Fire Assistance	92.4	92.4	95.0	95.0	121.6
Other	—	—	—	—	222.0
DOI, Total	\$1,302.6	\$1,440.4	\$1,443.1	\$1,455.4	\$507.6
WFM, Total	992.6	1,110.4	1,113.1	1,125.4	507.6
WFM Preparedness	347.1	355.5	355.5	370.5	—
WFM Suppression	383.7	383.7	383.7	383.7	—
WFM Fuels Management	220.0	304.3	304.0	304.3	90.6
WFM Other	41.9	66.9	66.9	66.9	90.0
WFM Unallocated	—	—	3.0	—	327.0
Wildfire Adjustment	310.0	330.0	330.0	330.0	—
Total, FS and DOI	\$5,542.7	\$6,071.9	\$6,080.1	\$6,128.0	\$1,681.2

Sources: CRS, with information from the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, P.L. 116-260, P.L. 117-43, and P.L. 117-58.

Notes: FS = Forest Service; DOI = Department of the Interior; WFM = Wildland Fire Management; NFS = National Forest System; SPF = State and Private Forestry. S. Comm. Maj. Draft refers to the Senate Committee majority draft bill (dated October 15, 2021) and explanatory statement posted on the website of the Senate Committee on Appropriations. Enacted Suppl. reflects supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-43 and P.L. 117-58; figures are not final and may change. Column totals may not add due to rounding.

Preparedness

Preparedness includes the range of tasks necessary to ensure readiness for wildfire response. Prior to FY2021, FS and DOI both used preparedness funds to maintain baseline personnel and provide training and education; manage infrastructure, equipment, and resources (e.g., aviation assets, engines, communication equipment); develop, maintain, and advance technological tools to enhance decisionmaking capacity; and prepare and execute fire management plans, cooperative agreements, and interagency coordination. Starting in FY2021, however, many of these activities for FS are covered in the salaries and expenses WFM budget line item.

Suppression

Suppression is the work associated with extinguishing or confining a fire. Suppression appropriations are used primarily for wildfire response, including funding aviation asset operations, conducting other support functions in direct support of wildfire incidents, and funding postfire emergency stabilization activities. Baseline suppression funding is provided to FS's and DOI's respective WFM accounts, and funds provided pursuant to the wildfire adjustment are appropriated to separate accounts for FS and DOI (and then transferred to the WFM account as needed).

Fuel Reduction

Fuel reduction is the manipulation or removal of wildland fuels (e.g., vegetation) to reduce potential wildfire risk.

Federal fuel reduction funding may be used for projects (or *treatments*) on federal lands, to provide assistance for projects on nonfederal lands, or to otherwise accelerate and incentivize fuel removal from federal lands. Fuel reduction activities are funded within DOI's Fuels Management activity (WFM account) and FS's Hazardous Fuels activity (National Forest System account). FS and DOI also receive funding through other accounts and programs that may be used for activities related to fuel reduction; thus, funding provided to each agency's respective Fuels program does not comprehensively reflect the funding available for these activities.

Other Wildfire Activities

FS and DOI receive appropriations for several other wildfire-related activities. For DOI, funding is provided within the WFM account for postfire rehabilitation, wildfire science and research, and facilities maintenance. For FS, appropriations are provided for wildfire assistance programs through its State and Private Forestry account. Wildfire assistance programs support state wildfire management programs and volunteer fire departments in rural communities. FS funding for wildfire science and long-term postfire rehabilitation activities may be derived from several FS accounts and programs.

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