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Funding for Wildfire Management: FY2022 Appropriations for the 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 overall have risen markedly since FY2000 (see **Figure 1**). For more information, 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**). 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 in other FS accounts for wildfire purposes.

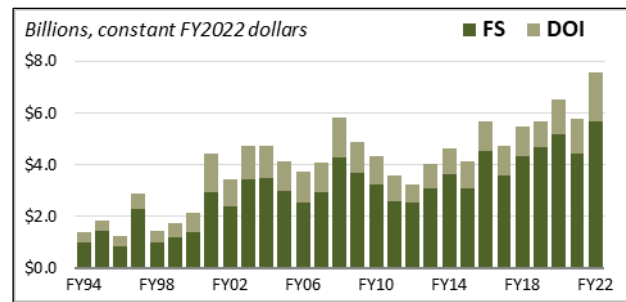
FY2022 Enacted Appropriations

In total, Congress provided \$7.449 billion in FY2022 wildfire appropriations to FS (\$5.585 billion) and DOI (\$1.864 billion). The combined total includes \$4.091 billion in the agencies’ WFM accounts, \$2.450 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and \$907.8 million to other FS accounts for wildfire purposes.

The FY2022 combined total also reflects \$1.681 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations provided in two laws: \$450.0 million in P.L. 117-43 (Division B) for expenses related to wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters in previous years, and \$1.231 billion in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58, Division J) for wildfire risk reduction purposes. IIJA also provides supplemental appropriations for FY2023 through FY2026. Without the supplemental funding, the regular-enacted FY2022 appropriation (as provided in P.L. 117-103, Division G) reflects an increase of \$224.9 million (4%) from FY2021 levels, which did not include any supplemental appropriations.

In earlier action, the House-passed H.R. 4502 would have provided \$6.080 billion and S. 3034 would have provided \$6.128 billion for FS and DOI wildfire purposes. Because regular FY2022 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year, several continuing resolutions provided funding at the FY2021 levels before enactment of P.L. 117-103 on March 15, 2022.

Figure 1. FS and DOI Wildfire Appropriations, FY1994-FY2022



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. Within their respective WFM accounts, both agencies receive funding for preparedness and suppression activities. DOI also receives funding through its WFM account for fuel reduction and other wildfire activities (e.g., site rehabilitation, assistance programs, research, facilities maintenance). FS also receives appropriations for fuel reduction and other wildfire purposes, but most of this funding is provided through other appropriations accounts. Another difference between the agencies is that FS has a separate budget line item in its WFM account for salaries and expenses.

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). For each of FY2020-FY2022, Congress has appropriated the baseline suppression funds to the agencies’ respective WFM accounts and appropriated the funds provided through the wildfire adjustment to a separate account for each agency, known as the *Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund*. 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	FY2021	FY2022					
		Request	H.R. 4502	S. 3034	Enacted		
					Suppl.	Reg.	Total
FS, Total	\$4,240.1	\$4,631.4	\$4,637.0	\$4,672.6	\$1,173.6	4,411.5	5,585.1
WFM, Total	1,927.2	2,097.6	2,098.6	2,097.6	552.2	2,005.1	2,557.3
<i>WFM Salaries and Expenses</i>	764.2	894.6	894.6	894.6	480.0	822.1	1,302.1
<i>WFM Preparedness</i>	152.0	192.0	192.0	192.0	—	172.0	172.0
<i>WFM Suppression</i>	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	—	1,011.0	1,011.0
<i>WFM Other/Unallocated</i>	—	—	1.0	—	72.2	—	72.2
Wildfire Adjustment	2,040.0	2,120.0	2,120.0	2,120.0	—	2,120	2,120.0
NFS Hazardous Fuels	180.4	321.4	323.4	360.0	277.8	187.4	465.2
Other	92.4	92.4	95.0	95.0	343.6	99.0	442.6
DOI, Total	\$1,302.6	\$1,440.4	\$1,443.1	\$1,455.4	\$507.6	1,356.1	1,863.7
WFM, Total	992.6	1,110.4	1,113.1	1,125.4	507.6	1,026.1	1,533.7
<i>WFM Preparedness</i>	347.1	355.5	355.5	370.5	75.9	370.5	446.5
<i>WFM Suppression</i>	383.7	383.7	383.7	383.7	—	383.7	383.7
<i>WFM Fuels Management</i>	220.0	304.3	304.0	304.3	307.6	227.0	534.6
<i>WFM Other/Unallocated</i>	41.9	66.9	69.9	66.9	124.1	44.9	169.0
Wildfire Adjustment	310.0	330.0	330.0	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	5,767.6	7,448.8

Sources: CRS, with information from P.L. 116-260, P.L. 117-43, P.L. 117-58, and P.L. 117-103, and other budget documents.

Notes: Suppl. = supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-43 and P.L. 117-58; Reg. = appropriations provided in P.L. 117-103; WFM = Wildland Fire Management; NFS = National Forest System. 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 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, FY2022 budget line item funding is provided to other accounts for wildfire assistance programs, wildfire science and research, burned area recovery and postfire restoration activities. In previous years, however, some of these activities did not receive line item appropriations and were funded through allocations and other indirect sources.

IJA Provisions

In addition to appropriating supplemental funding, IJA included new or amended program and funding authorizations for wildfire-related activities at FS and DOI. Some provisions required the agencies to adopt reforms related to the wildland firefighter workforce, establish new assistance programs, and codify the Joint Fire Science Program, among others.

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