



FEDERAL FOREST

RESOURCE COALITION

FFRC Weekly Report for Friday, April 13, 2018

Turmoil in Washington as Speaker Ryan Announces Retirement Plans: Farm Bill Emerges in House Amid Partisan Uproar: The House of Representatives returned from a two-week recess to the somewhat surprising news that Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) would not run for re-election this year, setting off an early leadership fight in the House. Ryan's announcement makes it over 40 House Republicans leaving through retirements or decisions to seek other office, putting the House of Representatives very much in play.

Early contenders to replace Ryan include Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA), and Freedom Caucus Founder Jim Jordan (R-OH). Of course, if history repeats itself, the House may flip and the leadership elections may be held by Democrats. On Thursday, Scalise announced he would not seek the post, seeming to clear the way for McCarthy.

The scramble to begin replacing Ryan served as a the backdrop for a Thursday release of a draft 2018 Farm Bill by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conaway (R-TX). "I'm excited to share our vision with the American people – and eager for people to see the details of a proposal that offers people real hope and promise," Conaway said. "I'm also looking forward to quickly moving this farm bill through the House and working with the Senate to deliver a farm bill to the president's desk that is on time, as the president has asked us to do."

The reaction from the Committee's minority office was less optimistic. Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN) called the bill "ideology run amok," suggested that the GOP was engaging in election-year messaging at the behest of outgoing speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI), and said that "unless something breaks on this food-stamp stuff I think the likelihood is going to be an extension" rather than passage into law in 2018. Committee minority staff said the bill "is not a bipartisan bill whatsoever," and that they "have serious concerns about this process and the possibility of a partisan farm bill not being able to fight off poison-pill amendments."

The forestry provisions includes 39 different sections, including 10 new CE's for various Forest Service activities. Of these, only four pertain to forest management directly – a new CE for "Early Seral" projects, a Salvage CE, and three new CE's that variously call for "critical response actions," effort to "enhance and improve" forests and range (primarily through grazing management), and restoration. The CE's are limited to 6,000 acres, and as usual exclude many sensitive areas of the National Forests. There are provisions streamlining interagency consultation and clarifying how to apply "extraordinary circumstances" regulations to CE' projects.

Chairman Conaway announced a [markup](#) of the bill for Wednesday, April 18th at 10am. The Chairman says he is willing to spend days in markup if needed.

Federal Agency MOU to Streamline Environmental Permitting Process: This week a memorandum of understanding was signed by a dozen federal agencies to implement President Trump's Executive Order on Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure, which directed agencies to cut the timeline for permitting big infrastructure to two years or less. The agencies in the executive order signed on including the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior. White House offices have indicated that the MOU allows one agency to take the lead on environmental impact statements for projects in order to cut down permitting time.

CEQ remains without a permanent Chair, after Kathleen Hartnett White's nomination was withdrawn early this year after Congressional opposition. CEQ is responsible for overseeing permitting regulations under the National Environmental Policy Act.

While helpful, this NEPA streamlining only applies to major infrastructure projects. The Forest Service is also engaging in rulemaking to update its own NEPA handbook, which was last updated in the early 1990's.

Trout OK With Coast Range Logging: Although they generally do not file comments on forest management projects, Coast Range Cutthroat Trout apparently have no problem with logging, according to a recent study.

Starting in 2006, a team of researchers from OSU, the U.S. Geological Survey, Colorado State University and the forest products industry studies the Alsea basin to study the impacts of modern logging practices conducted in compliance with the Oregon Forest Practices Act. They assessed the numbers of cutthroat trout, aged one year old and older, annually through 2014 in the watersheds of Needle Branch and Flynn creeks, and also documented forest cover, stream habitat conditions and stream temperature and discharge.

Logging occurred in Needle Branch in 2009, but Flynn Creek was left unharvested. The results were published March 1 in a professional journal, *Forest Ecology and Management*. In the latest study, the biomass of cutthroat trout in Needle Branch increased after the tree harvest relative to the trout in Flynn. In the headwaters area of Needle Branch, nearly all of the trees were cut with the exception of the required buffer strip along the fish-bearing portion of the stream.

"We can confidently say that, in this watershed, cutthroat trout were not negatively affected by logging activities over the course of the study," said Doug Bateman, the lead author of the paper, now a retired researcher in the College of Forestry. "We're cautious about generalizing these results to other watersheds, since conditions can vary so much. Still, these fish are probably well adapted to changes in the streams, and forests provide some of the best remaining habitat for them. When you move downstream into areas adjacent to farm fields and urban areas, the changes to rivers and streams can pose significant challenges. It's important to look at the watershed as a whole."

Upcoming Events:

USDA Secretary Perdue – and Interim Chief Vicki Christiansen – will face the [House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee](#) on Wednesday, April 18th at 9:30 AM to review and defend the proposed FY 2019 budget for the Forest Service.

On April 18th, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will hold a [hearing](#) to review the appropriate role of states and the federal government in protecting groundwater. The Senate Natural Resources Committee will hold a [hearing](#) to examine rural energy challenges and opportunities on April 19th at 10:00 AM. No witness list has been released for either hearing yet.

Also in the mystery category is a [full committee markup](#) in House Natural Resources, also on April 18th at 10:15 AM. No roster of bills has been released yet.



Bill Imbergamo
Executive Director
202-518-6380 office
703-629-6877 mobile
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