



FEDERAL FOREST RESOURCE COALITION

FFRC Weekly Report for Friday, February 9, 2018

Congress Passes Budget Increase Without Addressing Fire Funding, Forest Management:

After four years of futility, Congress decided to continue ignoring the long-standing problem of how the Federal government budgets and pays for wildfire suppression costs, agreeing in the wee hours of Friday morning to a budget “caps” adjustment bill that fails to include a fire budget fix or forest management provisions that would begin to turn the corner on our forest health crisis.

“We’re gravely disappointed that a fire funding and forest management package wasn’t incorporated into the budget deal making its way through Congress,” said Bill Imbergamo, Executive Director of FFRC. “These issues are solvable. They have to be solved if the Forest Service is going to produce the benefits all Americans want, like clean water, wildlife habitat, and jobs. We’re grateful that Congressional leaders worked to find a resolution, and we thank them for their efforts, which went down to the wire. We hope this setback doesn’t discourage folks from finding a reasonable middle ground before the 2018 fire season gets underway.”

Champions of fire funding and forest management reform in Congress worked until the final hours of negotiations to get a deal included in the bill, but the complex, multisided negotiations failed to produce a result, so there will be no provisions in the Continuing Resolution that President Trump signed into law on Friday morning. That bill adjusts budget caps for two years (these were the budget caps agreed to in 2013), and provides a CR (basically flat funding) for government operations until March 23rd.

As the deal unraveled on Wednesday afternoon, FFRC worked with conversation and industry partners to keep the negotiations alive by sending the attached letter calling for continued efforts to reach a modest deal. We’ll work with these and other partners to ensure that such a deal is included in the March 23rd CR, and work to see that our other management priorities remain on the table as other legislative vehicles move forward this year.

Continuing Resolution Provides Emergency Spending, But President’s Budget Rumored to Suggest Large Cuts to the Forest Service:

The CR (the fifth this year, in case you were counting) provides the Forest Service with \$119.7 million in supplemental funding for fire and hurricane damage and expenses in 2017, with \$7.5 million for State and Private Forestry; \$20.6 million for National Forest System to restore habitat and watersheds, repair riparian areas, and other recovery efforts on national forest system lands; and \$91.6 million for Capital Improvement and

Maintenance for repairs to agency infrastructure that was destroyed by both the hurricanes and the 2017 fire season.

President's Budget Tentatively Expected Next Week: As of now, the Trump Administration is expected to release their FY 2019 budget proposal on Monday, February 12th. Due to the late passage of the latest CR, this may slip. Federal budget laws require the President to submit his budget by the first Monday in February. Unlike Federal tax laws, however, there are no civil or criminal penalties for missing that deadline (and, it should be noted, the Obama Administration failed to submit timely budgets in all but 2 of their 8 years). Rumor has it that the budget will recommend huge reductions in discretionary spending, including forest management accounts. We'll see what the budget holds, and we likely won't have details until the agency explanatory notes come out one to two weeks after the formal budget roll out.

Nominee for Key White House Job Bows Out: Late on Sunday, February 4th, the White House announced that the President was withdrawing his nomination of Kathleen Hartnett White to be Chairwoman of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), a key post on environment issues.

CEQ is a White House office responsible for coordinating across agencies to develop environmental policy, and for developing guidelines for complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). White drew significant opposition from Democrats who branded her as a "climate change denier," and less public (but equally strident) opposition from members of both parties who couldn't bear her prior opposition to subsidies for corn ethanol and other biofuels. Her nomination cleared the Environment & Public Works Committee on a very narrow vote in November of last year, but Democrats placed anonymous "holds" on her nomination, effectively killing it.

Mary Neumayr currently serves as chief of staff and Acting Chair of CEQ. Much like the (still vacant) Undersecretary for Natural Resources at USDA, these long "acting" stints in Schedule C (politically appointed, Senate confirmed) positions could create legal challenges. Acting officials are supposed to be either confirmed or replaced within one year of being named, according to the Vacancies Act. During the Obama Administration, Christy Goldfuss served as Acting Chair of CEQ for over 18 months, and as a result guidelines she approved were challenged based on the Vacancies Act. Before those challenges could go to trial, Goldfuss stepped down with the change in Administration.

A nominee for the USDA NRE Undersecretary position has reportedly been through the background check process, but no nomination has been sent to the Hill as of today.

FFRC PAC Kicks Off 2018 Fundraising Drive: Congress is facing a consequential election this fall, and without the involvement of FFRC PAC, champions of Federal timber issue can lose elections and influence. We'll be reaching out to all of you with information about our Political Action Committee in the near future. Meantime, if you'd like to contribute, [please send us an email](#).

Greens Threaten to Sue over 1,800 Acres of Thinning (Because of Course They Do): After years of working with the community, the Forest Service is trying to use a Categorical Exclusion to expedite a non-commercial thinning project on the 1.6 million acre Santa Fe National Forest. Green groups, naturally, are [threatening to file a lawsuit](#). If you can stomach it, follow the link and read all the way through the story, to where the local anti-management advocate says they should just protect the trophy homes and let the whole watershed go up in a ball of fire. Inspirational.

House Natural Resources Subcommittee Hears Package of National Monument Bills: The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands met Tuesday, February 6th, to consider a series of bipartisan national monument, conservation, and recreation bills highlighting the importance of local stakeholder engagement in conservation management decisions. The bills under consideration were:

- H.R. 835 (Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-CO), updating the map and modifying the boundary of the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument;
- H.R. 857 (Rep. Paul Cook, R-CA), authorizing activities in the California Desert Conservation Area, and for other purposes; and
- H.R. 4895 (Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-MS), establishing the Medgar Evers National Monument in Mississippi.

You can watch an archived webcast and read the bills and testimony at [this link](#).

H.R. 835, introduced by Subcommittee on Water, Power & Oceans Chairman Doug Lamborn, expands the boundaries of the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in Colorado by roughly 280 acres. Originally designated by Congress in 1969, the monument size is currently capped at 6,000 acres. In May 2016, the National Park Service (NPS) received a donation of 280 acres of private land to expand the monument, which requires action from Congress.

Norm Steen, Commissioner of Teller County, Colorado, testified that the expansion of the monument will provide critical access for “wildland fire protection and opportunities for completing hazardous fuel mitigation projects, provide a natural buffer from surrounding developed areas, as well as provide additional wildlife habitat to the Monument.”

H.R. 857, the “California Off-Road Recreation and Conservation Act,” promotes conservation and enhanced recreation activities in the California Desert Conservation Area by designating six National Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas, more than 330,000 acres of new wilderness study and 77 miles of new Wild and Scenic Rivers.

H.R. 4895, the “Medgar Evers National Monument Act,” establishes the Medgar Evers National Monument in Jackson, Mississippi. Introduced by Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS) and co-sponsored by House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT), the bipartisan bill preserves the home of Medgar Evers and honors his legacy as an icon of the Civil Rights movement. Evers, a local leader in the NAACP, was killed in his driveway in 1963.

Upcoming Events: On Wednesday, February 14th, the House Natural Resources will be holding a [Full Committee Markup](#). On Thursday, February 15th, House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining will hold a [legislative hearing](#) to consider five bills.



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