



FEDERAL FOREST

RESOURCE COALITION

FFRC Weekly Report for Friday, January 5, 2018

Forest Service Launches NEPA Reform Effort: On Wednesday, January 3rd, the Forest Service published an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) to modernize their NEPA regulations for the first time in a quarter century. This Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) is the initial formal step in the modernization of Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) being led by Associate Deputy Chief Chris French.

It's worth remembering that the NEPA guidelines (adopted during the Clinton Administration) have been in place during an era in which the National Forest System has experienced massive declines in Forest Health, matched with massive increases in catastrophic fire (not to mention a decline in NFS timber outputs that devastated timber dependent economies across the country). This effort takes place against a backdrop in which GAO has firmly established that the Forest Service does more complex, time consuming, and expensive NEPA compliance than other Federal land managers.

FFRC will file detailed comments on the ANPR, and continue to interact with the Forest Service leadership as they roll out this modernization process. We have provided feedback through other rulemaking processes during this Administration that will serve as the basis for our comments on this ANPR – calling for a generally more streamlined approach to NEPA compliance, including simply following existing CEQ guidance on which level of analysis is required for relatively modest projects. Longstanding CEQ guidance, for instance, recommends that EIS's only be used for significant environmental impacts, and that they should be completed in one year or less, and should be generally less than 300 pages. Forest Service NEPA processes frequently take up to four years and documents run into the thousands of pages.

Comments are due on February 2nd. Our goal is to have our comments completed by January 26th, and we'd urge all of our members and affiliates to submit the same or similar comments by the February 2nd Deadline.

Congress Returns, Funding Battle Resumes: The Congress (well, the Senate, anyway) returned to work this week (the House comes back on January 8), facing hard deadlines to keep the government open. The current CR expires on January 19th, meaning lawmakers have a short window once again to find a solution. The four congressional leaders met with the White House this week to discuss potential solutions. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi has called on her Democratic colleagues to demand higher domestic spending per a letter earlier this week.

Immigration, disaster aid, children's health insurance program, Trump's campaign promise for a wall among the Mexican border, and Defense spending will all figure in the politics of a spending package.

Of course, as usual, the January 19th CR represents the last, best hope to push for a comprehensive fire funding and forest management solution. It remains to be seen whether Congress can, after four years of struggling with an issue on which there is an obvious, broad based bipartisan consensus, legislate a fix. Or, we can face the 2018 fire season with a broken budget, irresponsible fire borrowing, and no forest management reforms in place.

Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) whose state was damaged by Hurricane Harvey, continues to express concern about not finding a disaster package with the next spending deal, "we keep getting the can kicked down the road... We need to get that addressed and so that's why I'm still hoping for the January 19 [deadline], but obviously there are a lot of moving parts." Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID) has also reportedly extracted commitments from Majority Leader McConnell to include both a flood insurance extension AND a fire funding fix in the next funding bill.

Stay tuned (and stay in close touch with your contracting officers).

Congress is Changing (a bit...): The new year saw two new Senators sworn in on Tuesday. Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN) took over the seat vacated by Al Franken, who was undone by allegations of past sexual misconduct. Smith, who was Minnesota's Lieutenant Governor, is expected to run for the remaining four years of Franken's term this coming November (putting Minnesota in the odd position of having both Senators, the Governor, and the whole House delegation on the ballot at the same time).

Meanwhile, Doug Jones (D-AL) was sworn in as the first democrat from Alabama in over a quarter century, after besting Roy Moore (R) in a bitter and ugly campaign. Jones will face voters again in 2020. Neither Smith nor Jones had been assigned to any Committees as of press time this week.

Two new retirements were announced this week: Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Rep. Bill Shuster (R-PA). Mitt Romney reportedly plans to run for the Utah seat, in fact shortly after the announcement he [changed](#) his Twitter location from Massachusetts to Utah. Hatch's retirement will cause a stir among Republican leadership as to who will fill the big Chair at the Senate Finance Committee if the Republicans remain in majority.

Of course, both Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) are both facing health challenges, and their abilities to continue serving, or at least to continue in their current capacities, remain in doubt.

Progress in White-Nose Syndrome Treatment: White-nose syndrome has killed over 6 million bats in the US and Canada over the past decade, killing 90-100% of bats with the disease. The Northern Research Station [announced](#) this past weekend that the fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, that causes white-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats may have a weakness. Research conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of New Hampshire shows that the fungus is negatively impacted by UV light. The study found that small

doses of UV light destroyed about 85% of the fungus exposed to the light and that only 1% of exposed areas survived against modest exposure. In this case a small hand-held UV light device was used for only a few seconds.

This new information could lead to big breakthroughs for the disastrous disease, and many government agencies are encouraged by the news. Lead author of the study and research botanist in the Northern Research Station lab, Jon Palmer, is “very hopeful that the fungus’ extreme vulnerability to UV light can be exploited to manage the disease and save bats.” The US Fish and Wildlife Service believes “investing in defeating WNS must be a priority, and the results from this study and contributing research give us hope that we can develop the tools to more effectively manage the fungus that causes the disease,” according to WNS coordinator Jeremy Coleman. Director of the Forest Service’s Northern Research Station and the Forest Products Laboratory, Tony Ferguson, noted “bats play a key role in the health of forests as well as the production of food in the United States, and developing an array of tools with which we can treat bats for white-nose syndrome is important to preserving these very important species.”

The next steps is to conduct farther research on if a UV light treatment can be used on already diseased bats. The disease has led to the listing of the Northern Long-Eared Bat as a threatened species, with potential impacts on forest management.

Upcoming Events

On Monday, January 8th, President Trump is speaking to the American Farm Bureau Federation annual meeting, the first sitting president to do so in over 25 years. He’s expected to tout the results of the President’s task force on rural prosperity, which will be released later next week. The report is expected to include recommendations on putting forests “back to work.”

On Wednesday, January 10th the House Committee on Natural Resources will hold a full committee [markup](#), however, the list of bills up for review have not yet been posted. On the same day the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will hold a [hearing](#) on “America’s Water Infrastructure Needs and Challenges.”



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