



Federal Forestry Management Reform

Background

More than 193 million acres of the National Forest System is managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), located within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Of this total, 46 million acres (24%) are designated as allowable for timber harvest. Less than half the allowable sale quantity of timber in existing forest plans is currently being harvested.

Declining timber sales negatively impact countless wood products businesses, local communities and schools that rely on the jobs and tax base provided by the industry. The decline in active management of federal lands also impacts the health and sustainability of the forests. The increasing cost of fire suppression further constrained the ability of USFS to effectively manage forest holdings, growing from 13% of appropriated USFS funds in 1991 to 50% in 2015.

Issue

After many years of Congressional debate, meaningful federal forest management legislation was enacted as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 and in the 2018 Farm Bill. Improvements and new measures include:

Spending Bill reform actions include:

- **Fire Borrowing Fix:** In order to address the escalating costs of fighting fires on federal lands, a fund of more than \$2 billion a year has been established to support firefighting efforts. The fund will increase over a 10-year period and may be accessed by the Forest Service when wildfire suppression costs exceed the 10-year average cost of wildfires, which are frozen at the 2015 level. This provision takes effect in 2020; current law will remain in effect through 2019.
- **NEPA Flexibility:** A new categorical exclusion from the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is established for hazardous fuels reduction on areas up to 3,000 acres.
- **Stewardship Contracts:** The deal also opens the way to more 20-year stewardship contracts, in which the Forest Service collaborates with states on forest management projects. Additionally, these new contracts will give preference to contactors that promote innovative use of wood products, including cross laminated timber.
- **Good Neighbor Authority (GNA):** The spending agreement allows for reconstruction, repair or restoration of Forest Service roads as part of GNA.
- **Road Access:** A simplified process for repairing and rebuilding access roads in some areas of national forests was established.
- A number of other **technical simplifications** which will allow for more efficient use of Forest Service resources were also passed, including expediting hazardous tree removal along electricity lines and easing consultation requirements with other agencies particularly with regard to the Endangered Species Act.

Farm Bill measures included:

- Expanded Good Neighbor Authority to allow Indian tribes and counties to participate in the program.
- An additional categorical exclusion for greater sage grouse and mule deer habitat.

- Some landscape scale forest restoration provisions that made it into the package, including the establishment of a competitive grant program for financial and technical assistance to encourage collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes.

Hardwood Federation Position

There is always work to be done regarding implementation and appropriations to ensure that spending and Farm Bill programs impacting the hardwood industry are funded and implemented as outlined in the two pieces of legislation. We will also be watching for legislation that could potentially reverse progress in this area and take defensive action.