



Federal Forestry Policy

The Issue

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 has also negatively impacted the health and sustainability of the forests.

The increasing cost of fire suppression has constrained the ability of USFS to effectively manage the multitude of issues that are related to forest management. In 1991, fire suppression programs accounted for 13% of USFS appropriated funds. In 2015, this figure grew to over 50% with additional increases anticipated in the future. In addition, since 2002, the Forest Service has transferred \$3.4 billion from non-fire suppression programs to fight fires, leaving other vital programs, including Timber Harvest programs, underfunded and underutilized.

Background

There are currently several bills in play that jointly address fire suppression funding and federal forest management:

- The House has passed HR 2647, the Resilient Federal Forest Act of 2015 which addresses both management and wildfire funding issues.
- In the Senate, Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chair Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) released a draft bill with the support of Democratic Senators Ron Wyden (OR) and Maria Cantwell (WA).
- Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) introduced his own fire funding and forest management bill at the same time. The bill is very similar to the House HR 2647.

Hardwood Federation Position

The Hardwood Federation urges passage of legislation providing both management improvements and adequate fire suppression budget mechanisms. Our priority measures include:

- Utilizing the private sector and their resources to expedite timber sales at every opportunity including maintenance and expansion of Good Neighbor Authority and Stewardship Contracting Programs.

- Reasonable reforms to environmental protection programs, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA), which streamline permitting processes and legal challenges for forest management programs, including timber harvest programs, in ways that ensure certainty and reliable time frames for decision making.
- Prioritization implementation of streamlined permitting under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), authorized under the 2014 Farm Bill, to projects that reduce a landscape's susceptibility to insect infestations or disease.
- Additional authority for categorical exclusions in three key areas: Critical response actions, salvage operations, and for meeting forest plan goals for early successional forests.
- Separating fire suppression dollars from pro-active forest management programs and eliminating "borrowing" of funds from management programs to pay for underfunded fire suppression activities.