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Forest Service: FY2021 Appropriations

The Forest Service (FS) is responsible for managing 193 million acres of land in the National Forest System (NFS); conducting forestry research; and providing assistance to state, local, private, and international forest owners. FS is an agency within the Department of Agriculture, but it receives discretionary appropriations through the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

FY2021 Discretionary Appropriations

Budget Request

The Trump Administration requested \$5.345 billion in FY2021 discretionary appropriations for FS, not including the wildfire adjustment. This would have been a decrease of \$138.6 million (-3%) from the regular-enacted appropriations for FY2020 and a decrease of \$209.4 million (-4%) from the FY2020 total enacted figure. The Trump Administration also requested an additional \$2.040 billion through the wildfire adjustment, for a total request of \$7.385 billion. The request reflected increases for some FS accounts and decreases for others, including no funding for one account (see **Table 1**).

FY2021 Enacted Appropriations

Congress appropriated \$7.424 billion in total FY2021 discretionary appropriations for FS, including \$5.384 billion in regular funding and \$2.040 billion pursuant to the

wildfire adjustment (P.L. 116-260). The law specified that appropriations to most FS accounts are to remain available through FY2024. It included decreases for all FS accounts as compared with the regular-enacted FY2020 appropriations, in part due to a budget restructuring and because some activities that previously were funded through discretionary appropriations received mandatory appropriations under the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA; P.L. 116-152), enacted August 4, 2020.

In earlier action, the House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 7612 on July 14, 2020. The measure was incorporated into Division C of H.R. 7608, which passed the House on July 24, 2020. Because regular FY2021 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year, several continuing resolutions provided funding at FY2020 levels before enactment of P.L. 116-260 on December 27, 2020.

Forest Service Appropriation Accounts

Starting in FY2021, FS has seven primary discretionary appropriations accounts, discussed below, generally in order of decreasing funding. This includes a new *Forest Service Operations* account established in FY2021. In addition to those seven accounts, FS has several other relatively small accounts. These accounts are combined into an “Other” category for this report.

Table 1. Forest Service (FS) Discretionary Appropriations, by Account (\$ in millions)

Account	FY2020			FY2021		
	Regular	Suppl.	Total	Requested	H-passed H.R. 7608	Enacted
Forest Service Operations (FSO)	—	—	—	—	—	\$1,026.2
Forest and Rangeland Research (FRR)	\$305.0	\$3.0	\$308.0	\$249.3	\$311.8	258.8
State and Private Forestry (SPF)	347.0	—	347.0	217.4	300.3	261.4
National Forest System (NFS)	1,957.5	34.0	1,991.5	2,005.1	2,062.4	1,786.9
Capital Improvement & Maintenance (CIM)	440.0	26.8	466.8	453.2	451.2	125.4
Land Acquisition (LA)	76.9	—	76.9	0	0	-5.6
Wildland Fire Management (WFM)	2,350.6	7.0	2,357.6	2,409.4	2,385.6	1,927.2
Wildfire Adjustment	1,950.0	—	1,950.0	2,040.0	2,040.0	2,040.0
Total WFM	4,300.6	7.0	4,307.6	4,449.4	4,425.6	3,967.2
Other ^a	6.4	—	6.4	10.4	5.4	3.7
Total, without wildfire adjustment	5,483.4	70.8	5,554.2	5,344.8	5,516.7	5,383.8
Total, with wildfire adjustment	7,433.4	70.8	7,504.2	7,384.8	7,556.7	7,423.8

Sources: P.L. 116-94; P.L. 116-136; FY2021 FS Budget Justification; H.R. 7608 (116th Congress); and P.L. 116-260.

Notes: Suppl. = supplemental appropriations. Figures reflect rescissions and deferrals. Column totals may not add due to rounding. The FSO account was established in P.L. 116-260.

a. This row includes total appropriations for several small accounts, including specified land acquisitions; Range Betterment Fund; gifts, donations, and bequests for research; management of lands for subsistence uses; and communication site administration.

Wildland Fire Management

The largest share of FS appropriations generally goes to the Wildland Fire Management (WFM) account. The WFM appropriation funds two programs: preparedness and suppression. Appropriations for preparedness are used to support efforts that assist with fire prevention and detection, equipment, and training. Appropriations for suppression are used primarily for wildfire response. This includes firefighter salaries, aviation asset operations, and incident support functions, as well as personnel and resources for post-fire analysis and recovery.

Prior to FY2018, however, WFM included funding for programs such as Hazardous Fuels, Cooperative Fire Assistance, and fire science and research. Starting in FY2018, these programs have been funded through other accounts, as described below. In addition, FS used to receive appropriations for suppression purposes to the FLAME wildfire suppression reserve account. FY2018 was the last year the FLAME account received appropriations.

Wildfire Adjustment/Wildfire Funding Fix

Starting in FY2020, additional funds for suppression operations are available to FS (and the Department of the Interior) pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, a budgetary mechanism established in P.L. 115-141 (Division O, §102(a)), commonly referred to as the *wildfire funding fix*. This mechanism allows Congress to provide additional funding above a specified baseline for wildfire suppression through an adjustment to the statutory limit on total discretionary spending. The baseline is the 10-year suppression obligation average, as reported in FY2015 (\$1.011 billion for FS). The maximum amount available pursuant to the adjustment was \$2.040 billion for FS in FY2021 and increases annually. The wildfire adjustment is available annually through FY2027, although the statutory limits for discretionary spending are currently in effect through FY2021.

National Forest System

The National Forest System (NFS) account funds activities related to the management of the national forests and grasslands, including planning, recreation, grazing, timber production, watershed, wildlife, and law enforcement, among other activities. Starting in FY2018, funding for the Hazardous Fuels program has been provided through the NFS account.

Forest Service Operations

Established in FY2021, the Forest Service Operations (FSO) account funds certain fixed costs and administrative expenses related to facilities maintenance and leasing, information technology, and other agency-wide organizational services. Prior to FY2021, many of these activities were funded through FS's practice of using *cost pools* from the other accounts.

Capital Improvement and Maintenance

The Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CIM) account funds FS efforts to provide and maintain facilities, roads, trails, and other infrastructure needs across the national forest system. This includes funding to address a backlog of deferred maintenance (DM). In FY2021, FS received

additional funding to address DM through a new mandatory fund established by GAOA. P.L. 116-260 and the accompanying explanatory statement (ES) provided for an allocation from the fund of \$285.0 million in mandatory spending for FS DM.

State and Private Forestry

The State and Private Forestry (SPF) account funds programs to provide assistance to nonfederal forest owners to protect forests from wildfires, insects, diseases, and invasive plants. In FY2020, SPF included funding for the Forest Legacy Program (FLP), a cost-share grant program that received discretionary appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF; 54 U.S.C. § 200301 et seq.). The GAOA made the LWCF mandatory spending. Accordingly, Congress did not include discretionary funding for FLP in FY2021, but P.L. 116-260 and the accompanying ES provided for an allocation of \$94.3 million in mandatory funding.

Forest and Rangeland Research

The Forest and Rangeland Research (FRR) account funds research and development efforts to provide scientific information and new technologies to support sustainable forest and rangeland management. FRR funds the Forest Inventory and Analysis program, which is a continuous census of the forest resources throughout the United States.

Land Acquisition

Prior to FY2021, the Land Acquisition (LA) account received discretionary funds derived from the LWCF for FS to acquire lands for conservation or ownership consolidation, among other purposes. Congress did not provide discretionary funding for LA in FY2021 and rescinded any unobligated balances remaining in the account. However, P.L. 116-260 and the accompanying ES provided for an allocation of \$123.9 million in mandatory funding for FY2021, under the authority in GAOA.

Other

Other includes several smaller appropriations accounts for specified land acquisition activities; the Range Betterment Fund; gifts, donations, and bequests for research; management of national forest lands for subsistence uses; and communication site administration.

Forest Service Budget Restructuring

The budgetary restructuring established in the FY2021 appropriations law comes in response to congressional direction to improve FS accounting, budgeting, and management practices. In addition to the establishment of the FSO account, the FY2021 appropriations law modified the FS's existing appropriations accounts by establishing a budget line item for *salaries and expenses* in the FSO, FRR, SPF, NFS, and WFM accounts. Congress previously enacted changes to the FS budget structure (e.g., in FY2018). Budgetary changes may improve congressional oversight moving forward but may make examining funding trends over time more challenging.

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