

Date of Hearing: May 1, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AJR 10 (Rogers) – As Introduced April 21, 2025

SUBJECT: United States Forest Service: federal funding

SUMMARY: Calls on the President and urges the California Congressional delegation to oppose budgets cuts to the United States Forest Service (USFS).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the United States Secretary of Agriculture to make provisions for the protection against destruction by fire and depredations upon the public forests and national forests which may have been set aside or which may be hereafter set aside. (16 United States Code (USC) 551)
- 2) Requires officials of the Forest Service designated by the Secretary of Agriculture, in all ways that are practicable, to aid in the enforcement of the laws of the states or territories with regard to stock, for the prevention and extinguishment of forest fires, and for the protection of fish and game, and with respect to national forests, to aid the other federal bureaus and departments on request from them, in the performance of the duties imposed on them by law. (16 USC 553)
- 3) In order to determine and demonstrate the best methods for the conservative management of forest and forest lands and the protection of timber and other forest products, directs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish and maintain, in cooperation with the state of California and with the surrounding states, a forest experiment station at such place or places as the Secretary may determine to be most suitable, and to conduct, independently or in cooperation with other branches of the federal government, the states, universities, colleges, county and municipal agencies, business organizations, and individuals, such silvicultural, dendrological, forest fire, economic, and other experiments and investigations as may be necessary. (16 USC 562)
- 4) Establishes the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force) and requires the Task Force to report to the appropriate policy and budget committees of the Legislature on progress made in achieving the goals and key actions identified in the state's action plan, on state expenditures made to implement these key actions, and on additional resources and policy changes needed to achieve these goals and key actions. (Public Resources Code 4771)

THIS RESOLUTION:

- 1) Calls on the President of the United States to honor his promise to save American lives and communities through forest management and wildfire risk reduction projects, and requests that he veto any legislation that defunds the USFS and, instead, work with Congress to protect and improve these programs.

- 2) States that the Legislature opposes cuts to the USFS, as well as proposals to indirectly cut wildfire prevention, wildfire suppression, and other forest management efforts by defunding them, while giving tax breaks to multinational corporations and billionaires.
- 3) Calls on our state's representatives in Congress to vote against cuts to the USFS budget and staffing levels, and to support legislation to protect and improve the federal government's forest management activities in California.
- 4) Requires the Chief Clerk of the Assembly to transmit copies of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, and to the author for appropriate distribution.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

- 1) **United States Forest Service.** Federal forest management dates back to 1876 when Congress created the office of Special Agent in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assess the quality and conditions of forests in the United States. In 1881 the USDA expanded the office into the Division of Forestry. A decade later Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 authorizing the President to designate public lands in the west into what were then called "forest reserves." Responsibility for these reserves fell under the Department of the Interior (DOI) until 1905 when President Theodore Roosevelt transferred their care to USDA's new USFS.

Today, the USFS, with approximately 35,000 employees across the country, manages the National Forest System, which consists of 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands covering 193 million acres in 43 states, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The USFS helps communities; state, local, and tribal governments; forest industries; and, private forest landowners improve conditions in both urban and rural areas. In total, the USFS helps to steward about 900 million forested acres in the United States, including 130 million acres in urban areas, where most Americans live.

Roughly one-third of California is forested and more than half – 57%, or nearly 19 million acres – of our forestlands are owned and managed by the federal government.

According to the Task Force, in 2023, the USFS committed \$930 million under the Wildfire Crisis Strategy to expand and continue efforts to reduce wildfire risk across the Western United States in 21 high risk landscapes, seven of which are in California, covering nearly 19 million acres, including:

- Klamath River Basin in California and Oregon – 10 million acres
- Trinity Forest Health & Fire-Resilient Rural Communities – 910,000 acres
- Plumas Community Protection – 285,000 acres
- North Yuba – 313,000 acres
- Stanislaus – 245,000 acres
- Southern California Fireshed Risk Reduction Strategy – 4 million acres

- Sierra & Elko Fronts in Nevada and California – 3.4 million acres

In 2020 and 2021, wildfires increased reforestation needs by more than 1.5 million acres, primarily in California and Oregon. In recognition of the fact reforestation needs are increasing in both acres and complexity, the USFS and DOI published Reforestation Goals and Assessments, and a Climate-Informed Plan to Increase Federal Seed and Nursery Capacity, which includes an agency-specific target to reforest more than 2.3 million acres nationwide by 2030 with much of that in California.

In addition to the work USFS conducts independently in each state, it also has partnerships with states for joint forest management goals and projects. The USFS and California have committed to maintain and restore healthy forests and rangelands through the Agreement for Shared Stewardship of California's Forest and Rangelands to treat a million acres of forest and wildlands annually by 2025, committing to each sustainably treat 500,000 acres per year.

The amount of USFS managed lands and the federal appropriations for that land management are a significant part of California's overall wildfire risk reduction strategies.

- 2) **Federal staffing shortage.** Last October, the USFS directed its employees in California to stop prescribed burning "for the foreseeable future," citing the need to preserve staff and equipment to fight wildfires if needed. The Angeles National Forest, managed by the USFS, covers more than 650,000 acres, about one-quarter of Los Angeles County.

Since taking office, President Trump has downsized the federal workforce by more than two million employees, including more than 7,000 employees at the USFS, and hundreds of positions at the National Park Service, the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Further, the Department of Government Efficiency plans to terminate lease contracts at nearly two dozen California offices including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, US EPA, USFS, and US Geological Survey.

Removing USFS employees from their jobs prevents the functions that keep the land intact, including clearing downed trees from trails, conducting post-fire restoration work, reforestation, maintaining campgrounds, and ensuring that all land uses comply with federal laws.

According to a 2010 report by the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition, it has been shown that post-wildfire rehabilitation costs can exceed the costs of wildfire suppression by up to 30 times, underscoring the necessity of proactive wildfire prevention, forest restoration, and hazardous fuel reduction efforts. If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, it would behoove California – and the nation – to maintain appropriate staffing and funding levels at USFS to fulfill its mission.

- 3) **AJR 10.** This resolution:

- States that the Legislature opposes cuts to the USFS, as well as proposals to indirectly cut wildfire prevention, wildfire suppression, and other forest management efforts by defunding them;

- Calls on our state's Representatives in Congress to vote against cuts to the USFS budget and staffing levels, and to support legislation to protect and improve the federal government's forest management activities in California; and,
- Calls on the President of the United States to honor his promise to save American lives and communities through forest management and wildfire risk reduction projects, and requests that he veto any legislation that defunds the USFS and instead work with Congress to protect and improve these programs.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

None on file

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Paige Brokaw / NAT. RES. /