

Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Tom McClintock, Chairman
Hearing Memorandum

March 21, 2016

To: All, Subcommittee on Federal Lands Members

From: Majority Committee Staff – Brent Blevins
Subcommittee on Federal Lands x6-7736

Hearing: Budget oversight hearing on “*Examining the Spending Priorities and Missions of the Forest Service in the President's Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Proposal.*”

The Subcommittee on Federal Lands will hold a budget oversight hearing on the President’s Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) budget request and other spending as it relates to U.S. Forest Service. The hearing will take place on **March 22, 2016, at 10:00 a.m. in 1324 Longworth**. The hearing will focus on agency priorities and accountability, appropriate use of taxpayer dollars, as well as the future mission of the Forest Service.

Policy Overview

- With our national debt currently exceeding **\$19.1 trillion**¹, the Obama Administration’s overall federal budget, including more than **\$5 billion**² for the Forest Service, continues a trend of irresponsible federal spending, while failing to address ongoing problems on Forest Service land.
- The budget seeks millions of new taxpayer dollars to purchase more federal lands despite massive maintenance backlogs and failed stewardship of current lands. According to the budget justification, the Forest Service has a **deferred maintenance backlog exceeding \$5 billion**.³
- The Forest Service’s annual timber harvest for FY15 was 2.9 billion board feet, which is **less than a quarter of the timber harvest in 1989**.⁴ This reduction in management can be **linked to the declining health of our nation’s forests**.
- The President’s FY17 Budget significantly **expands federal land acquisition** with a significant increase and permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The proposal also requests almost \$128 million from LWCF be appropriated to the Forest Service for land acquisition, more than double the enacted amount in FY16.⁵

¹ <http://www.treasurydirect.gov/NP/debt/current>

² Page B-2, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

³ <http://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/FY-2017-FS-budget-justification.pdf>

⁴ http://www.fs.fed.us/forestmanagement/documents/sold-harvest/reports/2015/2015_Q1-Q4_CandS_SW.pdf

⁵ Pages 39 and 40, *Forest Service, FY 2017 Budget Justification*

- Thought it is not reflected in the President’s budget proposal, the effects of **litigation** on the Forest Service have been paralyzing. The Forest Service engages in lengthy analysis in order to reduce the possibility of litigation, which reduces the emphasis on active management.
- The Forest Service has touted the environmental and social benefits of a robust and responsible grazing program, yet the Administration is **proposing reductions in range management while increasing fees.**

Invited Witness

Thomas Tidwell
 Chief, U.S. Forest Service
 U.S. Department of Agriculture
 Washington, DC

Budget Overview

The Forest Service is responsible for managing 193 million acres of land in 155 National Forests, 20 National Grasslands and 8 National Monuments in 44 states and territories (equivalent of ten percent of the continental U.S. land base).⁶ Within this area, the agency manages 442 wilderness areas encompassing 36 million acres. The Forest Service is entrusted with a multiple-use mission and claims activities on Forest Service lands contribute \$36 billion to America’s economy each year and supports nearly 450,000 jobs.⁷ In 2015, the agency employed more than **32,000 Full Time Employees** (FTEs).⁸

FY16 President’s Request \$5.78 billion
FY16 Enacted \$6.36 billion* (**Included a one-time deposit of \$823 million into the FLAME suppression account and a one-time increase of \$600 million for wildfire suppression.*)
FY17 President’s Request \$6.22 billion** (***includes a fire transfer repayment cap contingency of \$864 million*)⁹

The President’s total FY17 discretionary request for the Forest Service is \$4.94 billion, a decrease of \$130 million from FY16 enacted. The Administration is also requesting an additional \$864 million as a Wildland Fire Suppression Cap adjustment to pay for the largest and expensive fires (**roughly one percent of all Forest Service fires**).

National Forest System Funding

The FY17 budget request for the National Forest System is \$1.509 billion, \$8 million fewer dollars than the enacted FY16 level. This figure includes: \$131 million for Law

⁶ *Forest Service Snapshot, Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*
⁷ *Forest Service Snapshot, Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*
⁸ *FTE Information provided by FS Budget Staff.*
⁹ *Page B-2 of Overview-- Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

Enforcement Operations; \$76.4 million for Minerals and Geology Management, a 2 percent decrease from FY16; \$50 million for grazing management, a 10 percent decrease from FY16; \$263.9 million for recreation management; \$60 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration; and \$127 million in Land Acquisition¹⁰

Wildland Fire Management

The FY16 budget requests \$2.45 billion, a \$65.1 million increase over FY16 enacted levels. It must be noted that this does not include the one-time appropriation of \$283 million to the FLAME reserve account.

This account includes: \$1.08 billion in preparedness and \$873.9 million for suppression, an eight percent increase of FY16 enacted levels. The Administration requests for the hazardous fuels program is \$384.1 million for wildfire prevention treatments in near communities with a projected target of 1.8 million acres treated.¹¹ The budget request for State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance is flat at \$78 million and \$13 million respectfully.¹²

Forest and Rangeland Research

The FY17 budget requests \$291.9 million; an increase of \$900,000 over the FY16 enacted level for forest and rangeland research, which includes areas such as wildland fire behavior, the spread of invasive species, and watershed protection.

State and Private Forestry

The FY17 budget requests \$234 million, a decrease of \$3 million over the FY16 enacted level.¹³ This includes reductions in the Forest Health Management Program, Urban and Community Forestry Program and International Forestry Program and increases in the Forest Legacy Program (conservation easements) and Landscape Scale Restoration Program.¹⁴ Approximately \$62 million would be derived from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Capital Improvement and Maintenance

The FY17 budget requests \$343.3 million for the Forest Service's principle construction and maintenance account for roads and facilities, a decrease of \$21 million from the FY16 enacted level.¹⁵ The Roads budget, important for access to forest health treatments and firefighting, is cut by more than \$22 million or 13 percent.¹⁶ The Forest Service proposes to reduce the number of miles of roads maintained by the agency by almost 5,000 from FY15.¹⁷

¹⁰ Page 228 of Land Acquisition, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹¹ Page 283 of Wildland Fire Management, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹² Pages 298 and 303 of Wildland Fire Management, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹³ Page 89 of State & Private Forestry, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹⁴ Page 89 of State & Private Forestry, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹⁵ Page 211 of Capital Improvements & Maintenance, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹⁶ Page 224 of Capital Improvements & Maintenance, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹⁷ Page 224 of Capital Improvements & Maintenance, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

Secure Rural Schools

The budget requests a reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools program through FY19 and requests \$279 million for FY17.¹⁸ The budget proposal includes a phase-out of the program, but does not include a legislative proposal for achieving this goal.

Fire Borrowing

The Administration again proposes a fire borrowing cap adjustment, noting that FY16 was the first year where a majority of the agency's spending was on fire suppression. This is the third consecutive year that the President's budget has included a proposal that would allow for 30 percent of the 10-year average of fire suppression costs to be off-budget. The House passed H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forest Act, in July 2015¹⁹ which includes language that would allow the Forest Service to access the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) in order to eliminate the practice of fire borrowing.

¹⁸ Page 337 of Payments to Communities, *Forest Service FY 2017 Budget Justification*

¹⁹ <http://naturalresources.house.gov/hr2647/>