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Funding for Wildfire Management: FY2023 Appropriations for Forest Service and Department of the Interior

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service (FS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) are responsible for wildfire response and management across the federal lands within their respective jurisdictions. Both FS and DOI generally receive annual discretionary appropriations for wildfire management activities through Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations laws. Wildfire management funding for DOI is provided to the department-level Office of Wildland Fire. Wildfire management appropriations fluctuate annually but overall have risen markedly since FY2000 (see **Figure 1**). For more information, see CRS Report R46583, *Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020)*.

In total, Congress provided \$7.549 billion in FY2022 discretionary wildfire appropriations to FS (\$5.685 billion) and DOI (\$1.864 billion). The combined total includes \$4.091 billion in the agencies’ Wildland Fire Management (WFM) accounts, \$2.450 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and \$1.008 billion to other FS accounts for wildfire purposes. The FY2022 combined total also reflects \$1.781 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations, some of which was provided in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58, Division J) for wildfire risk reduction purposes.

FY2023 Budget Request

The Biden Administration requested a total of \$6.525 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations for wildfire purposes for FS and DOI (see **Table 1**), an increase of \$757.1 million (13%) relative to the FY2022 regular-enacted appropriation. The request included \$3.878 billion in the agencies’ WFM accounts, \$2.550 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and \$96.4 million to other FS accounts for wildfire purposes.

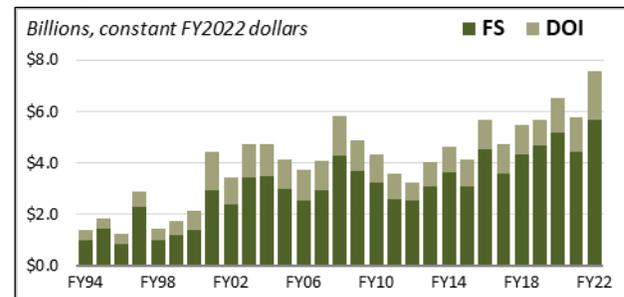
Legislative Activity

On July 20, 2022, the House passed H.R. 8294, an omnibus appropriations measure with \$6.538 billion in funding in Division E for FS and DOI wildfire purposes (see **Table 1**). On July 28, 2022, S. 4686 was introduced, reflecting a Senate Appropriations Committee majority draft text with \$6.419 billion for FS. Regular FY2023 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year, but a continuing resolution provides funding at the FY2022 levels through December 16, 2022 (P.L. 117-180).

FY2023 Supplemental Appropriations

Through IIJA, FS and DOI receive \$670.0 million combined for FY2023 for wildfire risk reduction purposes.

Figure 1. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations, FY1994-FY2022



Source: CRS.

Notes: DOI = Department of the Interior; FS = Forest Service. Figures are adjusted to constant dollars using the Office of Management and Budget’s GDP Chained Price Index.

Wildfire Accounts and Activities

FS and DOI each have a WFM account. Within their respective WFM accounts, both agencies receive funding for preparedness and suppression activities. DOI also receives funding through its WFM account for fuel reduction and other wildfire activities (e.g., site rehabilitation, assistance programs, research, facilities maintenance). FS also receives appropriations for fuel reduction and other wildfire purposes, but most of this funding has been provided through other appropriations accounts. Another difference between the agencies is that FS has a separate budget line item in its WFM account for salaries and expenses.

Starting in FY2020, FS and DOI receive additional funding for suppression through the *wildfire adjustment* (2 U.S.C. §901(b)(2)(F)), also known as the *wildfire funding fix*, a budgetary mechanism that allows for an upward adjustment of the discretionary spending limits to accommodate a specific amount of additional funding for suppression. These additional funds essentially are exempt from the spending limits. A precondition for using the adjustment is that Congress must appropriate a baseline amount of funding within the limits. The baseline is equal to the 10-year suppression obligation average as reported in FY2015 (\$1.011 billion for FS and \$383.7 million for DOI). For each of FY2020-FY2022, Congress appropriated the baseline suppression funds to the agencies’ respective WFM accounts and appropriated the funds provided through the wildfire adjustment to a separate account for each agency, the *Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund*. The wildfire adjustment is available annually through FY2027, and the maximum amount available under the adjustment increases annually as established in the statute.

Table I. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations (\$ in millions)

Account	FY2022			FY2023			Suppl. Enacted
	Regular	Suppl.	Total Enacted	Request	H-Passed H.R. 8294	S. 4686	
FS, Total	\$4,411.5	\$1,273.6	\$5,685.1	\$4,985.1	\$4,992.2	\$4,964.7	\$407.4
WFM, Total	2,005.1	552.2	2,557.3	2,678.7	2,678.7	2,604.7	36.0
<i>Salaries and Expenses</i>	822.1	480.0	1,302.1	1,154.3	1,154.3	1,154.3	—
<i>Preparedness</i>	172.0	—	172.0	192.0	192.0	192.0	—
<i>Suppression</i>	1,011.0	—	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	—
<i>Other/Unallocated</i>	—	72.2	72.2	—	—	—	36.0
<i>Hazardous Fuels</i>	—	—	—	321.4	321.4	247.4	—
Wildfire Adjustment	2,120.0	—	2,120.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	—
NFS Hazardous Fuels	187.4	277.8	465.2	—	—	—	102.8
Other	99.0	443.6	542.6	96.4	103.5	150.0	268.6
DOI, Total	1,356.1	507.6	1,863.7	1,539.6	1,543.1	1,503.3	262.6
WFM, Total	1,026.1	507.6	1,533.7	1,199.6	1,203.1	1,163.3	262.6
<i>Preparedness</i>	370.5	75.9	446.5	477.2	477.2	477.2	42.3
<i>Suppression</i>	383.7	—	383.7	383.7	383.7	383.7	—
<i>Fuels Management</i>	227.0	307.6	534.6	304.3	304.3	267.0	156.4
<i>Other/Unallocated</i>	44.9	124.1	169.0	34.5	38.0	35.5	63.9
Wildfire Adjustment	330.0	—	330.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	—
Total, FS and DOI	5,767.6	1,781.2	7,548.8	6,524.7	6,535.3	6,467.9	670.0

Sources: CRS, with information from the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and other budget documents.

Notes: Suppl. = supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-43 (FY2022) and P.L. 117-58 (FY2022 and FY2023); WFM = Wildland Fire Management; NFS = National Forest System. Column totals may not add due to rounding.

Preparedness

Preparedness includes the range of tasks necessary to ensure readiness for wildfire response. Prior to FY2021, both FS and DOI used preparedness funds to maintain baseline personnel and provide training and education; manage infrastructure, equipment, and resources (e.g., aviation assets, engines, communication equipment); develop, maintain, and advance technological tools to enhance decisionmaking capacity; and prepare and execute fire management plans, cooperative agreements, and interagency coordination. Starting in FY2021, however, many of these activities for FS are covered in the salaries and expenses WFM budget line item.

Suppression

Suppression is the work associated with extinguishing or confining a fire. Suppression appropriations are used primarily for wildfire response, including funding aviation asset operations, conducting other support functions in direct support of wildfire incidents, and funding postfire emergency stabilization activities. Baseline suppression funding is provided to FS's and DOI's respective WFM accounts, and funds provided pursuant to the wildfire adjustment are transferred to the WFM account as needed.

Fuel Reduction

Fuel reduction is the manipulation or removal of wildland fuels (e.g., vegetation) to reduce potential wildfire risk. Federal fuel reduction funding may be used for projects (or *treatments*) on federal lands, to provide assistance for projects on nonfederal lands, or to otherwise accelerate and

incentivize fuel removal from federal lands. Fuel reduction activities are funded within DOI's Fuels Management activity (WFM account) and FS's Hazardous Fuels activity (National Forest System account). FS requested moving the Hazardous Fuels activity to its WFM account for FY2023; H.R. 8294 and S. 4686 reflect this proposed change. FS and DOI also receive funding through other accounts and programs that may be used for activities related to fuel reduction; thus, funding provided to each agency's respective Fuels program does not comprehensively reflect the total funding available for these activities.

Other Wildfire Activities

FS and DOI receive appropriations for several other wildfire-related activities. For DOI, funding is provided within the WFM account for postfire rehabilitation, wildfire science and research, and facilities maintenance. For FS, budget line item funding is provided to other accounts for wildfire assistance programs, wildfire science and research, burned area recovery, and postfire restoration activities. In previous years, however, some of these activities did not receive line item appropriations and were funded through allocations and other indirect sources.

Issues for Congress

For FY2023, issues for Congress include determining the amount of funding for wildfire accounts and activities and the terms and conditions of such funding, as well as whether to enact related Biden Administration proposals.

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