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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 federal lands within their respective jurisdictions. Both FS and DOI generally receive discretionary appropriations for wildfire management activities through annual 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 FY1994 (see **Figure 1**). For more information, see CRS Report R46583, *Federal Wildfire Management: Ten-Year Funding Trends and Issues (FY2011-FY2020)*.

FY2023 Budget Request

The Biden Administration requested a total of \$6.525 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations for FS and DOI wildfire purposes (see **Table 1**), an increase of \$757.1 million (13%) relative to the FY2022 regular enacted appropriation (of \$5.768 billion) and \$1.024 billion (14%) less than the FY2022 total enacted appropriation (of \$7.549 billion). The request included \$3.878 billion in the agencies’ Wildland Fire Management (WFM) accounts, \$2.550 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and \$96.4 million to other FS accounts for other wildfire purposes.

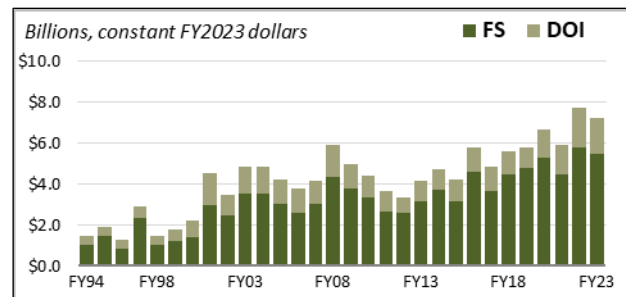
FY2023 Enacted Appropriations

FS and DOI received a combined total of \$7.208 billion in FY2023 discretionary appropriations (see **Table 1**). The combined total consists of \$5.438 billion for FS and \$1.770 billion for DOI. This combined total also consists of \$3.958 billion in the agencies’ WFM accounts, \$2.550 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and \$699.9 million to other FS accounts for other wildfire purposes. One component of the combined total is \$713.2 million for hazardous fuels management purposes (\$309.8 million for FS and \$403.4 million for DOI).

The FY2023 combined total reflects \$4.468 billion in regular appropriations provided through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2023 (P.L. 117-328, Division G), and \$2.740 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations provided through two laws: the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; P.L. 117-58, Division J) and the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations, FY2023 (P.L. 117-328, Division N).

Regular FY2023 appropriations were not enacted by the start of the fiscal year, but continuing resolutions provided funding at the FY2022 levels until P.L. 117-328 was signed into law on December 29, 2022.

Figure 1. FS and DOI Discretionary Wildfire Appropriations, FY1994-FY2023



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 wildland fire 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, including National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Forest and Rangeland Research. Unlike DOI, FS has a separate budget line item in its WFM account for salaries and expenses.

Since FY2020, FS and DOI have received 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 allocations to accommodate a specific amount of additional funding for suppression. A precondition for using the adjustment is that Congress must appropriate a baseline amount of funding for suppression purposes. The baseline is equal to the 10-year suppression obligation average as reported in FY2015 (\$1.011 billion for FS; \$383.7 million for DOI). For each of FY2020-FY2023, 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.

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

Account	FY2022		FY2023				
	Total Enacted	Request	H-Passed H.R. 8294	S-Introduced S. 4686	Enacted		
					Regular	Supplemental	Total
FS, Total	\$5,685.1	\$4,985.1	\$4,992.2	\$4,964.7	\$3,464.5	\$1,973.4	\$5,437.9
WFM, Total	2,557.3	2,678.7	2,678.7	2,604.7	946.0	1,582.0	2,528.0
<i>Salaries and Expenses</i>	1,302.1	1,154.3	1,154.3	1,154.3	914.0	—	914.0
<i>Preparedness</i>	172.0	192.0	192.0	192.0	32.0	—	32.0
<i>Suppression</i>	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	1,011.0	—	1,546.0	1,546.0
<i>Other/Unallocated</i>	72.2	—	—	—	—	36.0	36.0
<i>Hazardous Fuels</i>	—	321.4	321.4	247.4	—	—	—
Wildfire Adjustment	2,120.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	2,210.0	—	2,210.0
NFS Hazardous Fuels	465.2	—	—	—	207.0	102.8	309.8
Other	542.6	96.4	103.5	150.0	101.5	288.6	390.1
DOI, Total	1,863.7	1,539.6	1,543.1	1,503.3	1,003.8	766.6	1,770.4
WFM, Total	1,533.7	1,199.6	1,203.1	1,163.3	663.8	766.6	1,430.4
<i>Preparedness</i>	446.5	477.2	477.2	477.2	381.8	87.6	469.4
<i>Suppression</i>	383.7	383.7	383.7	383.7	—	458.7	458.7
<i>Fuels Management</i>	534.6	304.3	304.3	267.0	247.0	156.4	403.4
<i>Other/Unallocated</i>	169.0	34.5	38.0	35.5	35.0	64.0	98.9
Wildfire Adjustment	330.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	340.0	—	340.0
Total, FS and DOI	7,548.8	6,524.7	6,535.3	6,467.9	4,468.2	2,740.0	7,208.2

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

Notes: FY2022 Total Enacted reflects regular and supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-43, P.L. 117-58, and P.L. 117-103. FY2023 Regular Enacted reflects appropriations provided in P.L. 117-328; FY2023 Supplemental Enacted reflects appropriations provided in P.L. 117-58, and P.L. 117-328. WFM = Wildland Fire Management; NFS = National Forest System. 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 and train baseline personnel; 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, 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. In FY2023, some suppression funding was allocated for presuppression 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 manipulating or removing 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 to move the Hazardous Fuels activity to its WFM account for FY2023; P.L. 117-328 did not adopt this proposed change. FS and DOI also receive funding through other accounts and programs that may be used for fuel reduction; thus, funding provided to each agency’s respective Fuels program does not 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.

Katie Hoover, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy

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