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FARM BILL MOVES THROUGH U.S. SENATE, HEALTHY FOREST CAUCUS STARTS IN U.S. HOUSE

FEDERAL BILL TO EXPAND FOREST MANAGEMENT PROVISIONS HEADS TO HOUSE, 'HEALTHY FOREST CAUCUS' FORMS | JUNE 17, 2013

Washington D.C.—Last week the U.S. Senate approved a Farm Bill that includes authority for the Forest Service to expand the use of the Healthy Forest Restorations Act to lands which may be threatened by insects or catastrophic fire (current law only allows these provisions on lands currently affected or adjacent to affected lands).

The bill also includes permanent reauthorization of the Stewardship Contracting Authority, which allows for landowners to enter into long-term contracts to meet land management objectives.

The bill passed the Senate in a decisive 66-27 vote. A memo from the Federal Forest Resource Coalition suggests this momentum should generate pressure for the House to also pass the bill.

No amendments were included in the final package as it left the Senate, including an amendment sponsored by Sen. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) to provide limitations on fire liability for Stewardship service contracts. There is still opportunity in the House to amend the bill.

Healthy Forest Caucus Launches in House:

Lead by Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) Paul Gosar (R-AZ), Derek Kilmer (D-WA) and Kristi Noem (R-SD), the House Healthy Forest Caucus was launched on Thursday, June 13th.

“Our federal and private forests are the lifeblood for many communities throughout our country” said the “Dear Colleague” letter announcing the formation of the Caucus. “However, today the health of our forests is being overlooked. Litigation, insufficient funding, and lack of active management have made our forests susceptible to drought, insects, diseases, and wildfire.”

Staff for Rep. Schrader indicated that the Caucus would focus on creating awareness of forest health problems and supporting active management.

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