

May 8, 2023

Funding for Wildfire Management: FY2024 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)*.

For FY2023, FS and DOI received a combined \$7.208 billion in discretionary appropriations (see **Table 1**). The combined total consists of \$5.438 billion for FS and \$1.770 billion 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).

For FY2024, issues for Congress include determining the amount of funding for wildfire accounts and activities and the terms and conditions of such funding, including whether to enact related Biden Administration proposals.

FY2024 Budget Request

The Biden Administration requested a total of \$7.100 billion in FY2024 discretionary appropriations for FS and DOI wildfire purposes (see **Table 1**). The request included \$4.297 billion in the agencies' Wildland Fire Management (WFM) accounts and \$2.650 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment. One component of the combined total is \$616.3 million requested for hazardous fuels reduction purposes.

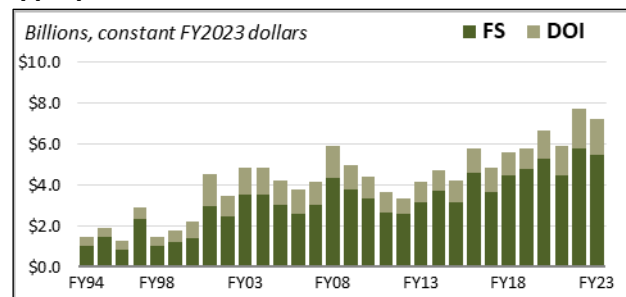
For FS, the Administration requested \$5.424 billion in FY2024 discretionary appropriations for wildfire purposes. This included \$2.970 billion to FS's WFM account, \$2.300 billion pursuant to the wildfire adjustment, and \$153.0 million to other FS accounts.

For DOI, the Administration requested \$1.676 billion in FY2024 discretionary appropriations for wildfire purposes. This included \$1.326 billion to DOI's WFM account and \$350.0 million pursuant to the wildfire adjustment.

FY2024 Supplemental Appropriations

Through IIJA, FS and DOI are set to receive \$670.0 million combined for FY2024 for wildfire risk reduction purposes.

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



Source: CRS analysis of appropriations acts, accompanying explanatory statements, and departmental reporting.

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

Account	FY2023	FY2024	
	Total Enacted	Request	Supplemental Enacted
FS, Total	\$5,437.9	\$5,423.6	407.4
WFM, Total	2,528.0	2,970.6	36.0
Salaries and Expenses	914.0	1,422.6	—
Preparedness	32.0	208.0	—
Suppression	1,546.0	1,011.0	—
Other/Unallocated	36.0	6.0	36.0
Hazardous Fuels	—	323.0	—
Wildfire Adjustment	2,210.0	2,300.0	—
NFS Hazardous Fuels	309.8	—	102.8
Other	390.1	153.0	268.6
DOI, Total	1,770.4	1,675.9	262.6
WFM, Total	1,430.4	1,325.9	262.6
Preparedness	469.4	592.5	42.3
Suppression	458.7	383.7	—
Fuels Management	403.4	293.3	156.4
Other/Unallocated	98.9	56.5	63.9
Wildfire Adjustment	340.0	350.0	—
Total, FS and DOI	7,208.2	7,099.5	670.0

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

Notes: FY2023 Total Enacted reflects regular and supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-58 and P.L. 117-328. FY2024 Supplemental Enacted reflects supplemental appropriations provided in P.L. 117-58. 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). For both FY2023 and FY2024, FS requested to move the Hazardous Fuels activity to its WFM account for FY2023; P.L. 117-328 did not adopt this proposed change for FY2023. 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, funding for other wildfire activities is provided as budget line items to other accounts for wildfire assistance programs, wildfire science and research, burned area recovery, and postfire restoration activities. In previous years, some of these activities did not receive line item appropriations and were funded through allocations and other indirect sources. For FY2024, FS requested \$6.0 million to its WFM account for funding a DOD satellite wildfire detection program.

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IFI2398

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