

Hardwood Federation Update

By Dana Lee Cole

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Federal Forest Management reform efforts continue to slowly work their way through the legislative process. On November 1, meaningful legislation that would address the wildfire funding crisis which is hamstringing the Forest Service, and give the Service more tools to execute on critical federal forest thinning and other forest management project work, passed the House of Representatives.

Known as **The Resilient Federal Forests Act**, H.R. 2936:

- allows the President to declare wildfires a “disaster” and allow these fires to be fought with emergency funding, instead of forcing the Forest Service Chief to borrow funds from other critical mission areas within the Forest Service budget.
- gives the Forest Service new authority to move quickly on forest management projects to improve forest health, so that wildfires are less likely.

Additionally, a manager’s amendment was approved that adds a new twist to the bill - provisions of the Timber Innovation Act - legislation that would promote research and development into using wood in tall buildings.

The focus of the legislation is **cross laminated timber** (CLT), which is growing in popularity among architects because of its strength, fire resistance and carbon sequestering properties. At present, CLT is primarily a softwood product. There is potential, however, for low grade hardwoods to be incorporated in the future, pending necessary testing and code revisions.

Although the House has passed H.R. 2936, its path forward in the Senate is less certain. Hardwood Federation will continue to work with Congress and remain fully engaged in moving these efforts forward.

New Chief of the U.S. Forest Service

In August, long time U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Chief Tom Tidwell announced he would be retiring after more than four decades at the agency. This news was quickly followed with the placement of Tony Tooke as incoming Chief. Mr. Tooke, a career employee of the Forest Service, is extremely well versed in USFS activity on the ground and in Washington. In his new post, Tooke will likely be tasked with helping USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue expand timber production in national forests.

In a welcome statement, Perdue said Tooke will “oversee efforts to get our forests working again, to make them more productive, and to create more jobs. His focus will be on ensuring we are good neighbors and are managing our forests effectively, efficiently, and responsibly, as well as working with states and local governments to ensure the utmost collaboration.”

Two other Confirmations

The Senate confirmed Ted McKinney, former director of the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, as the Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs at USDA. This is a new position created by USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue to increase attention to the trade issues that are so important to the agricultural industry. Mr. McKinney has pledged to work closely with U.S Trade Ambassador Lighthizer and the Trade Council to ensure that farmers and ranchers are protected in the renegotiation of NAFTA, and in any new or revised free trade deals.

The Senate also confirmed Stephen Censky as the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Censky will work to focus USDA on critical issues like the expansion of trade agreements to benefit U.S. agricultural exports, the importance of crop insurance to farmers, and the impacts of climate change on farming operations.

Undersecretaries are essential in managing the Department divisions and agencies under their purview, and in driving the priority policy initiatives identified by the Secretary. As they assume their new roles, we are looking forward to working with both Undersecretary McKinney and Undersecretary Censky.