

Hardwood Federation Update

By Dana Lee Cole

Hardwood Federation Executive Director

Federal Forest Efforts Quietly Advance

While the trade war with China has consumed much of Hardwood Federation's attention this year, we are following and engaging other pressing public policy issues. Federal forest management reform is one of these. And it has policymakers working toward solutions.

Earlier this year, Senators Steve Daines (R-MT) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) announced joint efforts on federal forest management reform legislation:

"We're working together to develop bipartisan legislation to improve management and speed up restoration of forest landscapes, create viable solutions for the removal of woody biomass and dead and dying trees, accelerate post-fire restoration and reforestation, and expedite targeted treatments of dangerously dense forested areas where wildfires are most likely to start."

Also under development—by our forester friend in the House, Congressman Bruce Westerman (R-AR-4) —is a bill that has more of a climate change/greenhouse gas reduction angle to it. We understand it will focus on three key areas:

Using more wood – The bill would accelerate more wood demand and creative uses of wood in buildings, paper production, energy, and chemical feedstocks, among other areas. The measure would include a sustainable building tax credit that allows residential and commercial builders to receive tax credits for building and renovating buildings that a) are innovative and use environmentally friendly building materials such as wood; b) are more energy efficient to operate and maintain; and c) store more carbon over time.

Growing more wood – The measure will promote making federal forests more resilient and productive so that they are maximizing the total amount of wood on our forest lands by thinning, and other management practices, to promote larger trees and more total wood per acre over time. According to Rep. Westerman, the idea is to manage forests in a manner which does not allow their canopies to close, which may make them less prone to catastrophic fires and provide much better wildlife habitat. Westerman believes forests managed in this way will also have many other ancillary benefits, such as water conservation, increased outdoor recreation and economic development in rural areas.

Increased tree planting – The proposal will seek to convert more marginal farmland and wetlands back to forest land through changes in existing conservation programs. This will be paired with incentives for planting more trees in urban areas and promoting afforestation through existing foreign aid incentive programs.

And finally, the bill would modernize the federal **Renewable Fuel Standard** (RFS) to allow forest-based biomass to qualify for this fuels mandate. Currently, the definition of "forest biomass" in the law authorizing the RFS is severely restrictive, so that only energy derived from tree plantations is eligible. Along with modernizing the RFS, Westerman's bill would

fund more research and development geared to developing more wood energy and wood feedstock technology to create more markets for wood.

As 2019 winds to a close, "other" issues will most likely trump federal forest management in the Congressional priority queue. Nonetheless, your Hardwood Federation team will continue to reach out to our champions in the House and Senate to remind them that federal forest reform remains a priority for the hardwood sector. Happy Holidays!