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## Bipartisan Forest Management Proposals

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This year's tragic fires out West have 'ignited' bipartisan recognition that removing hazardous fuel loads and thinning overstocked stands on federal forests could help the situation. In mid-September, at a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing to discuss the wildfire issues, both sides of the aisle agreed that "we can't sit here and do nothing!"

**Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act (S. 4431)**, the product of months of work between the staffs of Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Senator Steve Daines (R-MT), takes a dual approach to forest management in that it includes both a supply and a demand component. On the **supply side**, S. 4431:

- Equips the U.S. Forest Service with additional tools to execute much needed forest thinning projects and landscape restoration work on federal lands.
- Creates a new categorical exclusion from the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) for the removal of dead and dying trees.
- Would free the Forest Service of the Cottonwood Decision - a 2015 court-imposed requirement that it consult again with the Fish and Wildlife Service on land management plans whenever new information emerges about potential effects.

On the **demand side**, the proposal authorizes \$100 million in grants, loans and loan guarantees for the siting and development of "biomass conversion facilities," defined in the bill as a facility that turns biomass into heat, power, advanced biofuels and/or biobased products, near federal forest lands. Inclusion of this language is a recognition that it is currently uneconomical to transport forest biomass to existing facilities that can use it—which are typically hundreds of miles from federal forest lands.

**Forest Health and Biomass Energy Act**, introduced by Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ), also attempts to address the demand side of the forest health crisis by incentivizing biomass energy development as a method to reduce hazardous fuel build-up in fire-prone forests. Senator McSally's legislation also would:

- Direct the Administration to assess the biomass energy fuel potential in U.S. forests with a focus on identifying the most viable sources for energy use such as ladder fuels and by-products of forest restoration including branches, slash and other low-value biomass.
- Establish a fund, using a percentage of timber sale revenues, to assist timber operators and biomass energy producers with the collection, harvesting and transportation of biomass material out of high hazard areas.

In her remarks at the Senate hearing, Senator McSally said, "My bill complements the forest management policies included in S. 4431, which I've cosponsored with Senator Daines. Together, our bills offer practical, cost-effective solutions to target the real root causes of these catastrophic wildfires, while also supporting low carbon energy."

With all the pre-election activity, it is unclear where any of these proposals are headed. Nonetheless, the Hardwood Federation will continue to monitor these and other proposals. And provide updated information when available.