

# Fire funding fix comes with environmental rollbacks

By Jessica Kutz, High Country News

Congress accomplished something unprecedented last week: They passed a bipartisan solution to a knotty budget issue that has hobbled the U.S. Forest Service's ability to do restoration and fire-prevention work in Western forests. The \$1.3 trillion federal spending package, signed into law by President Trump, included a long-sought funding fix for wildfire response. Starting in 2020, the Forest Service will be able to access over \$2 billion a year outside of its regular fire suppression budget.

Some conservation groups question whether the fix was worth the compromises included in the bill, which could undermine environmental protections for forests and wildlife. The bill includes two riders that concern them. The first will allow logging projects less than 3,000 acres in size to move forward with little environmental review, so long as the goal of those projects is to reduce heavy fuel loads that increase fire risk.

A second provision could delay habitat protections for newly listed threatened and endangered species.

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