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Written by David Weber, Kirstin Gruver

The western United States is again in the middle of a devastating wildfire season, with states like California experiencing the largest fires in state history. Wildfires are becoming a summertime fixture, bringing with them poor air quality and destruction of forest lands and neighboring communities. Recently, both state and federal governmental entities have taken steps towards mitigating wildfires, increasing opportunities for companies selling and using woody byproducts.

Agreement for Shared Stewardship of California's Forest and Rangelands

On August 13, 2020, the State of California and the U.S. Forest Service signed the [Agreement for Shared Stewardship of California's Forest and Rangelands](#) (Agreement), which, among other things, seeks to manage forest lands in such a way as to reduce wildfire risks. Under the agreement, the California Natural Resources Agency and the U.S. Forest Service will develop a coordinated approach to “increase the pace, scale, and effectiveness of forest and rangeland stewardship in California.” This includes treating one million acres of forest and wildlands

per year. Some of the treatments used will be thinning, timber harvesting, and prescribed burning. Notably, the agreement seeks to develop a market for wood products that result from forest treatments. Specifically, the agreement makes room for the woody byproducts to be used in construction or as biomass energy.

The Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020

Senators Steve Daines and Diane Feinstein introduced the [Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020](#) (Wildfire Act) in early August. The Wildfire Act would implement new fire mitigation projects, more proactive forest management plans, and create markets for timber on federal lands. For example, the Wildfire Act would also establish a 3,000-acre categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act to accelerate management projects near existing roads, trails, and transmission lines. The Wildfire Act would also lift the export ban on unprocessed timber from federal lands for trees that are dead or dying and create a grant program for the removal of biomass from National Forest areas and transport them to biomass conversion facilities.

The Broader Context

As wildfires continue to scour the west's forest lands, both legislative and administrative initiatives appear to be growing. Responses at both the state and federal level seek to streamline approvals of forest management projects, increase state and federal coordination, and open markets for forest management byproducts.

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