

**USDA Forest Service - Southwestern Region
Forestry, Forest Health and Cooperative Forestry – Briefing Paper**

Topic: Fiscal Year 2020 Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) funding, and status of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Technical Advisory Panel meeting

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Background: The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) was established pursuant to the “Community Forest Restoration Act of 2000” (the Act) to reduce the threat of wildfire, improve the functioning of forest ecosystems, and enhance biodiversity by reducing small diameter trees across all public lands in New Mexico. The program provides cost-share grants for projects that are designed and implemented through a collaborative process. Grants recipients include small businesses, tribes and non-profit organizations. Project funds support forest industry jobs in rural New Mexico communities. The Region has approximately \$3 Million in FY20 hazardous fuels reduction funds set aside for program grants. Pursuant to the Act, a chartered Federal Advisory Committee (the Panel) reviews CFRP grant proposals and provides recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture (Secretary) on which ones best meet the program objectives. The Secretary approves project funding and appoints Panel members. The FACA Panel Charter must be reauthorized by the Secretary every two years. There is no provision in the Act for the Secretary to fund CFRP projects that have not been reviewed by the Panel.

Issues: There are several issues confronting CFRP, which the CFRP Program Manager is currently managing:

- Status of being able to convene the Panel in FY20 to review and recommend projects for Secretary’s approval
- FY19 CFRP applications were not reviewed, approved or funded due to The Federal Advisory Committee Charter (the Charter) being approved on September 27, 2019. At that time the Region could not convene the Panel because nine members’ terms had expired.
- FY20 applications were received and are awaiting review, along with FY19 applications. However, at this time the Regional budget of approximately \$3 million for CFRP grant awards is prioritized for FY19 applications per the Secretary’s approval. Funding is not available at this time for FY20 approved projects.
- Current misunderstanding within the CFRP and New Mexico restoration communities on how, and if, CFRP is funded.
- A contingency plan is in place for FY20 CFRP hazardous fuels funds if the Panel or Secretary approval occurs too late in FY20 for grants to be awarded

Status of issues and solutions for managing the issues for the remaining FY20:

- Status of convening the Panel - On August 4th Secretary Purdue approved the nomination slate and appointed the Panel members. The Panel meeting will be held virtually via Zoom for the Panel and for applicants while their applications are being reviewed. The Public can view the meeting from YouTube where it will be streamed as a live event. The YouTube address will be posted on the [CFRP website](#), along with all applications and administrative documents.

The Panel meeting will be split into two different review sessions. The 2019 applications will be reviewed from Sept. 15-17 and the 2020 applications will be reviewed Sept. 22-24. For Panel meeting specifics, refer to the attached agendas.



- The following addresses FY19 and FY20 applications review and available funding issues:
 - FY 2019 applications will be reviewed and ranked separately from the FY 2020 applications. The priority is to fund approved FY 2019 projects.
 - At this time the Forest Service does not have federal appropriations for FY2020 projects. However, we have requested FY2020 applications to be reviewed, recommended for funding and approved. Should additional funds become available then the Region can move forward in awarding approved FY2020 projects.
- Current misunderstanding within the CFRP and New Mexico restoration partnerships on how, and if, CFRP is funded. Congress and the Washington Office have not provided separate funding for CFRP since at least 2015. Funds come off the top of the Southwestern Regional budget. As budgets are being reduced annually the Regional Forester continues to prioritize funding CFRP. This is extremely significant and shows the commitment the Region has for the program.
- At this time the Region has developed a contingency plan for FY20 CFRP hazardous fuels funds due to Panel process occurring too late in FY20 for grants to be awarded. Items consider for this contingency plan are: 1) projects that reduce the potential of uncharacteristic wildlife and improve watersheds, 2) have a direct benefit to New Mexico communities and forest industries, and 3) have to be projects where existing contracts or agreements are in place, so funds could be obligated prior to the end of FY20.