

115TH CONGRESS } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES { REPORT
2d Session } 115-765

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 2019

JUNE 19, 2018.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of
the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. CALVERT, from the Committee on Appropriations,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

together with

DISSENTING VIEWS

[To accompany H.R. 6147]

The Committee on Appropriations submits the following report in explanation of the accompanying bill making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019. The bill provides regular annual appropriations for the Department of the Interior (except the Bureau of Reclamation and the Central Utah Project), the Environmental Protection Agency, and for other related agencies, including the Forest Service, the Indian Health Service, the Smithsonian Institution, and the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities.

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Two-year Budget Authority.—Building upon efforts included in the Consolidated Appropriation Act, 2017, P.L. 115–31, the Committee provides two-year budget authority for most Forest Service accounts in the fiscal year 2019 bill. The Committee understands this may require a transition period and pledges to work with the Service to identify appropriate mechanisms to provide for a smooth implementation, if needed.

Wildland Fire Management.—The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (P.L. 115–141) provided a budget cap adjustment for wild-fire suppression costs and included several forest management reforms. The goal of these provisions is to improve the condition of our national forests. As such, the Committee directs and strongly encourages the Service to provide a high level of scrutiny for the Wildland Fire Management account in the remaining months of fiscal year 2018 and fiscal year 2019 in order to ensure increased and appropriate transparency and identify effective cost-containment measures. The Committee supports the Service’s plans to engage the Office of Management and Budget and the Department of the Interior on cost-recovery and other issues, as well as the States on similar issues. The Committee believes more accurate accounting for wildfire suppression costs will help the Federal government, States, and other partners to better understand cost drivers, control costs, and budget appropriately in the future. Without progress on this front, the condition of the national forests is likely to continue to deteriorate, which is an unacceptable outcome for the American people and our Nation’s natural resource heritage.

Government Accountability Office Report.—The Committee supports the Service’s plan to implement the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommendations included in the report titled “Forest Service: Improvements Needed in Internal Control over Budget Execution Process” (GAO–18–56) and reminds the Service to work with the Committee should it find challenges to implementing the recommendations. The Service is directed to provide to the Committee a summary of its implementation activities on July 31, 2018, and January 31, 2020.

Forest Service Research.—The Committee supports forestry research, but it continues to have concerns about the lack of a regular, rigorous review cycle for research programs and projects; the lack of focus on the needs of the National Forest System; little coordination with the Department of Agriculture’s and other Federal research agencies; and responsiveness to industry, stakeholder, and partner input. As such, the Committee directs the Service to develop and begin to implement a plan to strengthen its research program, within one year of enactment of this Act, using existing guidelines and best practices for Federal research agencies. The Service is directed to consult with the Committee; other congressional committees, as appropriate; the Department of Agriculture, including its Chief Scientist and the Agricultural Research Service; and other Federal agencies and interested parties.

Pests, Diseases, and Invasive Species.—The Committee recognizes that National Forest System lands, as well as other forested lands in the United States, are at increasing risk for insect and disease outbreaks and invasive plant infestations, which often result in catastrophic wildland fire. The Emerald Ash Borer, bark beetle, and cogon grass are but three examples of these threats. As such, the