

October 25, 2024

**Coverage of the Latest
Policy News**

Headlines this week:

- Wood-Building Material Grants
- H-2B Visas
- Federal Lands
- Homebuyer Tax Credit Legislation
- Voting
- FRA Fall Meetings & Webinar

Wood-Building Material Grants

Yesterday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service announced the opening of the application periods for three key programs to accelerate projects that will deliver more innovative wood-building materials into the marketplace. The announcement may be found [here](#).

The three programs are the Wood Innovations Grant (WIG), Community Wood, and the Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance Grant programs. The Farm Bill authorizes the first two, while the latter was enacted as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

In this announcement, the Forest Service is making available \$34 million in grant funding to support a wide range of activities, including wood-building product manufacturing as well as renewable heat and power projects that rely on forest thinning material and/or sawdust.

The application deadline for WIG grants is December 11, while the other two is December 18.

H-2B Visas

Senators Angus King (I-ME) and Mike Rounds (R-SD) and a bipartisan group of 38 additional Senators sent a [letter](#) to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Mayorkas and the Acting Department of Labor (DOL) Secretary Su asking for the release of supplemental H-2B visas for FY 25.

"In light of these labor shortages, we strongly urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Department of Labor (DOL), to utilize the authority provided by Congress in the FY2025 Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act to release the maximum allowable number of additional H-2B visas for Fiscal Year 2025, as you did for Fiscal Year 2024. These visas will help employers handle their labor challenges, and provide additional certainty regarding their workforce planning decisions in the coming months. We urge you to promptly publish a temporary rule implementing the release of these supplemental visas."

The letter was also signed by Senators John Barrasso (R-WY), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tom Carper (D-DE), Susan Collins (R-ME), Chris Coons (D-DE), John Cornyn (R-TX), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Mike Crapo (R-ID), John Fetterman (D-PA), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), George Helmy (D-NJ), John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), Joe Manchin (I-WV), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Pete Ricketts (R-NE), Jim Risch (R-ID), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Tina Smith (D-MN), Dan Sullivan (R-AK), John Thune (R-SD), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Mark Warner (D-VA), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Peter Welch (D-VT), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) and Tim Scott (R-SC).

A similar [letter](#) being led by Reps. Andy Harris (R-MD-01) and Shelly Pingree (D-ME-01) will be delivered to Secretary Mayorkas next week. Over the past several weeks, FRA has been reaching out to members of Congress, urging them to support the letters.

Federal Lands

FRA attended the Federal Timber Purchasers Committee meeting with the Forest Service in Bend, Oregon, this week. During the meeting, the Forest Service announced that fiscal constraints will lead to reduced timber outputs across most regions. The forest industry voiced its frustration over the agency’s ongoing lack of emphasis on timber management. Additionally, the Forest Service indicated that they will not be hiring seasonal workers for FY2025, except for fire suppression roles. Below are the initial timber targets for Federal FY2025 compared to FY2024.

USDA_FS Region	Timber Targets (Million BF)		
	FY2025	FY2024	%Change
Region 1	317	373	-15%
Region 2	155	198	-22%
Region 3	156	165	-5%
Region 4	142	157	-9%
Region 5	386	395	-2%
Region 6	562	611	-8%
Region 8	534	560	-5%
Region 9	544	683	-20%
Region 10	4	6	-33%
Totals	2,800	3,147	-11%



Homebuyer Tax Credit Legislation

Rep. Jimmy Gomez (D-CA-34) introduced the American Homeownership Opportunity Act of 2024 this week. The bill has not yet been assigned a number.

Gomez is a House Ways & Means Committee member, and this legislation is geared toward helping a potential Harris-Walz administration achieve their stated goal of building 3 million new homes in her first term. Specifically, the legislation authorizes a downpayment credit of up to \$50,000 for first-time homebuyers. The measure would also incentivize new starter home construction through new business credit initiatives. The credit is enhanced if the ultimate purchaser is a first-time home buyer.

The supporting material for the bill asserts that the average age of a first-time home buyer in 2023 was 35, up from 28 in 1991. Moreover, the average cost of a starter home has increased 54 percent over the past 5 years.

Again, this bill frames out part of Vice President Harris's platform for home affordability and promoting new home construction. Obviously, its future in the next Congress is dependent on the election outcome next month, but FRA will monitor developments closely.

Countdown to Election 2024

KEY POLLS (Source: RealClear Politics)

[2024 General Election: Trump vs. Harris \(Tie\)](#)

[2024 Generic Congressional Vote: Republicans \(+0.1\)](#)

KEY BATTLES (Trump vs. Harris, 2024 Elections)

[Arizona](#) Trump +1.5

[Nevada](#) Trump +0.7

[Wisconsin](#) Trump +0.2

[Michigan](#) Trump +0.2

[Pennsylvania](#) Trump +0.6

[North Carolina](#) Trump +0.8

[Georgia](#) Trump +2.2

FRA Fall Meetings

Please join FRA and its members for our 2024 Fall Meetings. If you have any questions about registration, lodging, or sponsorship opportunities, please contact Claire Gedde.

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to access the Summary of Business from the October 1-3 FRA Joint National and Western Region Fall Meeting.

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to access the Summary of Business from the October 15-17 FRA Joint Appalachian & Southeastern Region/Forest Products Security Group Fall Meeting Summary of Business.

FRA 2024 Southcentral Region Fall Steering Committee Meeting

November 5-6, Hampton Inn (Eagle Point/Hwy 280), Birmingham, AL

Register [Here](#)

FRA 2024 Timber Harvesting & Procurement Short Course

December 9-13, University of Georgia, Athens, GA

*If you are interested in attending the short course and would like to learn more, please email Clay Altizer at caltizer@forestresources.org.

FRA Webinar

Join us on Thursday, October 31, at 2:00 PM EST for a webinar on "Communication Preferences for the 5 Working Generations in the Forest Industry," presented by Dr. Jo Daniel, PhD., Assistant Professor of Forest Operations for Auburn University College of Forestry, Wildlife and Environment.

[Register Here](#)
