



# Summary of Issues 2023

## FRA'S POSITION ON WORKFORCE, TRANSPORTATION, AND BIOENERGY

**The Forest Resources Association (FRA)** represents the interests of nearly 350 organizations and businesses in the forest products industry. Our members include forest landowners, suppliers, consuming mills, associated businesses, and state forestry associations. FRA promotes the interests of its members in the economic, efficient, and sustainable use of forest resources to meet the needs of the wood fiber supply chain through private enterprise. FRA members are represented in 49 states and 384 congressional districts.

### REQUESTS

#### Forestry Jobs

- Cosponsor the Jobs in the Woods Act (H.R. 5344)

#### H-2B Reform

- Support legislation that provides an exemption from the H-2B cap for forestry workers to address the multi-year tree planting backlog on public and private lands.
- Support an H-2B Returning Worker Exemption OR other meaningful cap relief in a final fiscal 2024 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill or any fiscal 2024 spending measure.
- Support permanent H-2B cap relief.

### WORKFORCE

#### Jobs In the Woods Act (H.R. 5344)

**Sponsors: Congresswomen Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR-5) & Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D-WA-3)**

**FRA supports legislation, “Jobs in the Woods Act,” establishing regional workforce training programs for individuals interested in a career in the forest products industry.**

The sustainability and competitive viability of the forest products industry relies on an intact, healthy wood supply chain, which includes the availability of skilled labor. The forest products industry struggles to find a trained and skilled workforce at all levels. These labor shortages limit investments to modernize or expand facilities in rural communities.

Congresswomen Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR-5) and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D-WA-3) introduced the bipartisan Jobs in the Woods Act (H.R. 5344) on September 5. The legislation would create a grant program for nonprofit organizations, state governments, and colleges to utilize workforce training in forestry-related fields – helping prepare students for jobs in the U.S. Forest Service and the timber industry.

#### H-2B Reform

The forest products industry’s enduring commitment to replant trees promptly after a timber harvest or natural disturbance lies at the very heart of our sector’s sustainability pledge. Each year, H-2B forestry workers plant 85 percent of the trees on public and private forestlands. But each year, it is becoming more difficult for employers of H-2B forestry workers to recruit the labor required to meet the increased demand for tree planting to restore forests on public and private forestland. In the national interest, the infrastructure law provided funding to increase tree seedling production and plant more forested acres on federal lands. However, the law does not address improved access to H-2B forestry workers to perform this work. If the labor shortage for tree planters is not addressed, the backlog of forestland acres, now at five years, will continue to increase. FRA has long advocated for the H-2B visa program reform to address the outdated arbitrary cap of 66,000 guestworker visas. Demand for H-2B guestworkers exceeds the mandated cap by two to three times annually. We encourage Congress to address this issue by recognizing that tree planting is a national interest and exempting forestry workers from the H-2B visa cap.





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### REQUESTS

#### Safe Routes Act

- Cosponsor the Safe Routes Act (H.R. 2493, S. 1818), improving safety and efficiency and lowering the carbon footprint of hauling raw forest products from the woods to the mill.

#### Other Transportation

##### Vote in favor of House Bills

- H.R. 3372 authorizes states to participate in a pilot program allowing trucks to haul 91,000 pounds on six axles on interstates.
- H.R. 3013, S. 1649 streamlines the process of obtaining a commercial driver's license (CDL).
- H.R. 3318 establishes a 10% axle weight variance for dry bulk materials.

#### Forest-Based Biomass

- Maintain existing statutory directive that federal agencies recognize the carbon neutrality of forest-based biomass in any final FY 2024 appropriations legislation.
- Include provisions in the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization legislation that builds upon the appropriations rider by binding federal agencies and departments to embrace biomass carbon neutrality in any federal environmental or energy rulemaking.

### TRANSPORTATION

**FRA supports transportation legislation that would improve truck safety and overall operation efficiencies on the federal interstate highway and provide support to our nation's truck drivers.**

#### Safe Routes Act. (H.R.2493, S. 1818)

**Sponsors: Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) & Congressman Mike Gallagher (R-WI-8)**

Bipartisan legislation that would allow trucks to travel at state-legal truck weight and configurations on that state's portion of the federal interstate highway. Our nation's federal interstate highway vehicle weight limit is outdated and out of touch with today's engineering advancements, economic needs, and safety concerns. The 80,000-pound truck weight restriction on federal interstates has introduced unnecessary costs, safety risks, and inefficiencies to raw material suppliers and finished product shippers that depend on our roadways every day.

In every state in the country, the allowable legal vehicle weight limit for state roads is higher than the limit imposed on federal highways. Federal highways are three to four times safer than state or secondary roads. This anomaly has created several unacceptable outcomes, including forcing trucks to travel longer distances on narrow state roads, crossing numerous intersections, and through small towns and school zones instead of safer, more direct routes on the federal interstates.

#### Other Transportation

Other transportation House Bills are working to improve the current trucking challenges we face with inefficiencies and safety concerns on the federal interstate highways. These include a pilot program for 91k pounds increased weights on six axles to be allowed on federal interstate highways, streamlining the CDL licenses process, and a 10% axle weight variance for dry bulk.

### Forest-Based Biomass

**FRA supports legislation that directs federal agencies to recognize the carbon neutrality of forest-based biomass energy in environmental or energy policy.**

The forest products industry is the primary producer and major consumer of a renewable, sustainable material derived from tree residuals known as biomass. This material takes many forms, including limbs and small branches generated at a harvesting site, bark and sawdust produced as a byproduct at sawmilling operations, and lignin extracted during the pulp and papermaking process. For pulp and paper facilities, upwards of 80 percent of a mill's heat and power needs are self-fulfilled using renewable forest-based biomass energy. FRA and governmental bodies ranging from the local to international level—including the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—view sustainably produced forest biomass energy as carbon neutral. Forest biomass emits carbon when combusted for energy, but the carbon released is that which has been sequestered over the growing life of the tree. Sustainably managed forests, where forest growth exceeds removals, ensure that the continual cycle of carbon uptake and release remains balanced.