

Why FRA Supports H-2B Reform

September 2023



Why More H-2B Visas are needed:

- Demand for H-2B forestry workers continues to be high. Currently there is a three- to five-year tree planting backlog.
- More H-2B visas are needed so employers can hire non-immigrant guest workers in a timely manner.
- Seasonal workers plant more than 85% of the acres of trees planted in the United States each year.
- Only two percent of the H-2B forestry jobs are filled by U.S. workers.
- Congress must provide a permanent and meaningful cap relief for the H-2B visa program as a standalone measure or as part of other relevant legislation.
- Congress must include H-2B cap relief in the FY 2023 final spending bills.

The forestry sector relies on seasonal H-2B visa forestry workers when there are not enough available U.S. workers to fill these short-term, remote, and itinerant jobs. The Congressionally mandated cap of 66,000 H-2B visas is inadequate to meet the labor needs of seasonal businesses. Currently, demand exceeds the cap by two to three times. Every H-2B worker supports an additional 4.6 American jobs and contributes to the economy of rural forest-dependent communities.

- A 2020 Government Accountability Office report concluded that “counties with H-2B employers generally had lower unemployment rates and higher average weekly wages than counties that do not have any H-2B employers.”
- Before receiving H-2B guest workers, businesses are required to advertise the available jobs to U.S. workers. In FY 2020, the number of U.S. workers who applied for these forestry jobs was only enough to fill two percent of the available positions.
- H-2B forestry workers plant more than 85% of the trees on public and private forestland each year. That amounts to planting 1.5 billion trees on nearly 2.2 million acres.
- More H-2B forestry workers will be needed to replant trees on forest lands devastated by wildfires and hurricanes and to address worker shortages. Currently, there is an estimated three- to five-year tree planting backlog on public and private forestlands. The USDA Forest Service has a 7-million-acre backlog of acres that require tree planting.
- Sixty percent of the employers of H-2B forestry workers stated that they anticipate their labor needs to increase in the next one- to three-years. Seventy-three percent said there would not be enough H-2B visas available to meet their tree-planting needs.
- The percentage of businesses that did not receive visas for all the H-2B forestry workers they requested doubled from 16% in FY 2019 to 32% in FY 2020.

Request:

- ❖ 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.



About FRA:

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.

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