

WASHINGTON REPORT

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Congress Finalizes FY 2022 Appropriations

Nearly 6 months overdue, the House and Senate passed a much-awaited FY 2022 omnibus spending package on March 9 and March 10, respectively. President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 (H.R. 2471) into law on March 15. The \$1.5 trillion legislative package combines all twelve FY 2022 appropriations bills and includes \$13.6 billion in military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine.

For FY 2022, USDA-ARS funding increased \$141 million to \$1.63 billion while USDA-NIFA funding increased \$67 million to \$1.64 billion. The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) competitive grants program increased by \$10 million for the fourth year in a row to \$445 million in FY 2022. Noteworthy highlights include a \$5 million increase in **Smith Lever** funding for Extension and a \$2.5 million increase for the **IR-4 Minor Crop Pest Management** program, its first increase in over a decade. Every dollar invested in the IR-4 Project generates \$524 in economic activity for the US.

There is also language in the FY 2022 omnibus that supports the creation of a regionally focused **Herbicide Resistance Initiative** for the Pacific Northwest to identify and overcome herbicide resistance associated with the crop production pathway, reducing production losses and reducing or eliminating pressure on trade limits due to contamination. It directs \$2 million to support research to address weed management strongly affecting the long-term economic sustainability of food systems in collaboration with ARS, research institutions, and stakeholder support.

For aquatic plant management, the Army Corps of Engineers received \$8 million for its Aquatic Plant Control Research program, its second \$1 million increase in a row. Of the \$8 million, \$1 million is designated for activities for monitoring, surveys, and control of **flowering rush** and **hydrilla** and \$7 million is for nationwide research and development to address invasive aquatic plants. The appropriations language also encourages the Army Corps to support cost-shared aquatic plant management programs, and in particular, to evaluate and address prevention of new infestations of **hydrilla** in the Connecticut River Basin.

Overall funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI) increased \$776 million to \$14.1 billion in FY 2022, with \$1.4 billion (+8 percent) directed to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); \$3.3 billion (+5 percent) to the National Park Service (NPS); \$1.65 billion (+4 percent) to the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and \$1.4 billion (+6 percent) to the US Geological Survey (USGS), which includes at least \$2.75 million for research on **harmful algal blooms**.

Within specific DOI programs important for invasive species management, BLM's Rangeland Management account received a \$3 million increase to \$109 million after being held level in FY 2021. The FWS's Wildlife and Habitat Management account under its National Wildlife Refuge

System received a \$10 million increase to \$250 million in FY 2022. The appropriation language directs \$15.9 million from this account to focus on high priority invasive species including nutria, **buffelgrass**, and **cheatgrass**. In addition, this account helps fund the FWS’s invasive species strike teams. Finally, the National Park Service’s (NPS) Resource Stewardship account received a \$20 million increase to \$382 million, which helps fund the NPS’s invasive plant management teams.

The table below includes final appropriations for FY 2019 – FY 2022 for various Federal programs important to weed and invasive plant research and management in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
	-----\$ millions-----			
USDA-ARS	\$1,303	\$1,414	\$1,492	\$1,633
USDA-NIFA	\$1,471	\$1,527	\$1,570	\$1,637
-AFRI Competitive Grants	\$415	\$425	\$435	\$445
-Hatch Act (Exp. stations)	\$259	\$259	\$259	\$260
-Smith Lever (Extension)	\$315	\$315	\$315	\$320
-IR-4 Program	\$12	\$12	\$12	\$14.5
-Crop Protection and Pest Management	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20
-SARE: Sustainable Ag Research & Educ.	\$37	\$37	\$40	\$45
-McIntire-Stennis Forestry Research	\$36	\$36	\$36	\$36
USDA-APHIS: Cogongrass eradication	n/a	n/a	\$3	\$3
Army Corps- Aquatic Plant Control research	\$6	\$6	\$7	\$8
EPA - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	\$300	\$320	\$330	\$348
NOAA - National Sea Grant College Program	\$68	\$74	\$75	\$76
DOI - BLM: Rangeland Management	\$104	\$106	\$106	\$109
DOI - FWS: National Wildlife Refuge System: Wildlife and Habitat Management	\$234	\$239	\$240	\$250
DOI - NPS: Resource Stewardship	\$334	\$342	\$362	\$382
DOI - Wildland Fire: Fuels Management	\$189	\$194	\$220	\$227

EPA Announces Endangered Species Act Protection Policy for New Pesticides

On January 11, 2022, the EPA announced that, effective immediately, the Agency’s review of applications for new pesticide active ingredients (AI) pursuant to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) will uniformly incorporate analysis under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with the intention of prioritizing protection for listed species as much as possible. The new policy applies to AI applications already submitted for consideration as well as incoming applications. [EPA press release](#).

Prior to this policy change, EPA has not uniformly required ESA analysis for all applications for new AIs, which often resulted in litigation against EPA. EPA expects the new policy to reduce litigation in general and improve the overall legal defensibility of new AI registrations.

EPA has explained that it intends to provide several mitigation options to allow the greatest flexibility for pesticide users while still ensuring protections for listed species. Mitigation efforts often include measures intended to avoid or minimize exposure routes between where pesticides are used and where the species live, restrict the geographic or temporal scope of pesticide applications, and reduce the number of pesticide applications allowed on a treated site.

To learn more about EPA's Endangered Species Act Protection Policy for New Pesticides, please see the [Q&A document](#).

EPA Updates Endangered Species Protection Bulletins

The EPA has released an improved version of Bulletins Live! Two (BLT), an online application for Endangered Species Protection Bulletins. BLT describes geographically specific pesticide use limitations to protect threatened and endangered species and their designated critical habitat. Pesticide applicators are required to reference the Bulletins Live! Two (BLT) website (<https://www.epa.gov/endangered-species/bulletins-live-two-view-bulletins>) when directed by a product label. If the pesticide label directs you to this website, you are required to follow the pesticide use limitation(s) found in the Bulletin for your intended application area, pesticide active ingredient or product and application month.

EPA's Bulletins contain the following information:

- A map of the user-defined intended application area.
- The user-selected active ingredient and/or pesticide product to be applied.
- Pesticide use limitation(s).
- The month for which the Bulletin is valid.

Important Notes about Bulletins

- Bulletins may be accessed up to six months before pesticide application. Be sure that you follow the correct Bulletin for the month of your pesticide application.
- When referenced on a pesticide label, Bulletins are enforceable use limitations under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).
- The pesticide use limitations found in Bulletins Live! Two are part of EPA's federal program to protect listed species. Your state may have pesticide use limitations beyond those found in your Bulletin. Bulletins are not intended to replace or override any restrictions that your state may impose. You need to be aware of and follow pesticide limitations according to both the state AND federal requirements.

For more information: <https://www.epa.gov/endangered-species/endangered-species-protection-bulletins>

Vilsack Announces 10-Year Strategy to Confront Wildfire Crisis

In response to the nation's growing wildfire crisis, USDA Secretary Vilsack and Forest Service Chief Moore have launched a strategy to address the threat to millions of acres and communities across the nation. The strategy will first target areas defined as being at the highest risk based on community exposure, including the Pacific Northwest, the Sierra Nevada Range in California, the front range of Colorado, and the Southwest. The plan highlights the importance of collaboration with the Department of Interior, Tribes, states, local communities, and private landowners to effectively address the crisis. For more information, click [here](#).

Wilkes Confirmed as USDA Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment



Homer Wilkes was sworn in on Feb. 11, 2022 to serve as Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment at USDA. His nomination was confirmed by the Senate by a voice vote. Wilkes is expected to work closely between USDA NRCS and the Forest Service on land restoration projects, including the 10-year wildfire mitigation plan.

Wilkes is a native of Port Gibson, Mississippi. He earned a B.S. in business finance, an M.B.A. and Ph.D. in urban higher education from Jackson State University. From 1984 to 2007, Wilkes served as a supply officer in the United States Navy Reserve. During his career, Wilkes has served within the NRCS as acting CFO, acting associate agency chief, and as Mississippi's state conservationist. Since 2013, Wilkes has worked as the director of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force.

Williams Confirmed as USFWS Director



On February 17, 2022, the U.S. Senate confirmed Martha Williams by voice vote to serve as the next Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), a position that has been vacant since January 2021. Williams has been leading the agency since January as Principal Deputy Director. Prior to that Williams served as Director of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks from 2017 to 2020. She previously served as an Assistant Professor of Law at the Blewett School of Law at the University of Montana and co-directed the university's Land Use and Natural Resources Clinic. Williams earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia and her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Montana School of Law.

Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young Senate Nomination Moves to a Vote

On January 12, the Senate Agriculture Committee advanced the nomination of Chavonda Jacobs-Young to be USDA's Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics. Dr. Jacobs-Young's nomination will now head to the Senate floor for a full-Senate vote. She is the Administrator of the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and currently serves as the Acting Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics and as Acting USDA Chief Scientist.

USDA-NIFA Director Named to Lead University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture



The director of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Carrie Castille, has been selected to serve as the next senior vice chancellor/senior vice president for the University of Tennessee (UT) Institute of Agriculture. This role oversees and leads the Herbert College of Agriculture, the College of Veterinary Medicine, UT AgResearch, and UT Extension, while also serving as the university's chief advocate on issues of agricultural policy in support of the state.

Dr. Castille will conclude her service at USDA in April and assume this new role July 1, 2022, pending approval of the UT Board of Trustees Executive Committee. In the interim, USDA and NIFA leaders are working closely together to plan for the agency's leadership transition and ensure operations continue seamlessly to best serve the mission and stakeholders.

Organic Weed Management Remains #1 Priority of Organic Industry

In March, the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) released the National Organic Research Agenda (NORA) and State of Organic Seed (SOS). The two reports are published every five years to examine organic farming challenges across the U.S., identify research needs, and better understand the organic seed needs of producers. Those reports were based on survey data from over 1,100 certified organic and 71 transitioning organic farmers and ranchers across North America.

Certified organic survey participants identified the following production challenges:

- 1. Controlling weeds – 67% of respondents**
2. Managing production costs – 59%
3. Maintaining adequate yields – 48%
4. Managing soil fertility and crop nutrition – 43%
5. Controlling insect pests – 41%
6. Finding appropriate organic crop varieties and seeds – 38%
7. Controlling disease pressure – 36%
8. Adapting to climate change – 36%

Controlling weeds clearly emerged as the most pressing production challenge, and the broader topic of “soil health” was second only to weeds in response to the open-ended survey question.

Focus group participants discussed difficulties managing weeds without degrading soil health, which underscores the need for additional research in organic weed management strategies that require less cultivation.

In addition, focus group discussions revealed that climate disruptions can accentuate other challenges in managing weeds, pests, soil, and water resources. These challenges appeared especially intense for Southern organic farmers, while producers in the moisture-limited Great Plains and Mountains found cover crops and other organic soil management practices more challenging than producers elsewhere. Survey details:

https://ofrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/OFRF_National-Organic-Research-Agenda-NORA_2022.pdf

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Meetings of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies

Jul. 18 - 21, 2022 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Greenville, SC www.apms.org

Dec. 5 - 8, 2022 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), St. Louis, MO www.ncwss.org

Jan. 23 - 26, 2023 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), Baton Rouge, LA www.swss.ws

Jan. 30 - Feb. 2, 2023 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Arlington, VA www.newss.org

Jan. 30 - Feb. 2, 2023 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), Arlington, VA www.wssa.net

Feb. 27 – Mar 2, 2023 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Boise, ID www.wsweedscience.org