



SUBJECT: Forest Service Partnership Enhancement Act

SUMMARY: The Partnership Enhancement Act would improve the Forest Service's ability to work with a wide variety of cooperators by expanding, clarifying, and simplifying legal authority to enter into mutual benefit agreements. Two bills were introduced into the 109th Congress with bipartisan support, H.R. 3818 and S. 2676. They were based on a proposal sent to Congress by the Administration.

Background

- The Forest Service has a long history of working with others to achieve the agency's mission. Partnerships build positive relationships, leverage funds and services, and enable landscape scale management of natural resources.
- The Forest Service has accumulated authorities for working cooperatively over a 100 year period, and at times the complex patchwork of existing authorities has resulted in inconsistent interpretation and time-consuming processes. The bills would update authorities to reflect new kinds of cooperative conservation relationships in the 21st century.
- The agency remains committed to strengthening our partnership authorities to:
 - 1) Provide legal clarity and less red tape from consolidated authority
 - 2) Make permanent crucial and fundamental "mutual benefit" type agreements
 - 3) Enhance watershed resources through cooperative projects
 - 4) Allow joint facilities and publications for interpretation and education where needed
 - 5) Allow visitors to purchase health and safety items in remote locations
 - 6) Allow funds to be advanced to partners
 - 7) Provide for long term partnerships through permanent authority

OUTLOOK: Although the 109th Congress did not enact either of the bills, the House Resources Committee held a hearing and voted favorably on H.R. 3818. The Forest Service is continuing discussions with partners and with congressional staff regarding its partnership authorities.

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