

Hazardous Fuels Transportation Assistance Act

Wildfire risk reduction projects can produce large amounts of residual woody material, known as woody biomass. Because hauling this material out of the forest is often too expensive, it is typically left behind. The resulting piles of biomass are later burned, increasing wildfire risk, smoke exposure, and community hazards. Therefore, removal of this woody biomass is critical for effective active forest management, but poor economic incentives prevent this work from being accomplished. **Transportation, particularly the initial haul from treatment sites to paved roadways, is a primary cost barrier to biomass utilization^{1,2}, often accounting for nearly half the total delivered cost of woody biomass³.** Without financial support, much of this material remains unutilized, limiting the effectiveness of hazardous fuels treatments.

The [Hazardous Fuels Transportation Assistance grant program](#) was established through Section 23002 of the IRA and has awarded \$20 to \$25 million in grants in FY24 and FY25. The Hazardous Fuels Transportation Assistance Act reauthorizes the program and establishes it in statute, while also expanding the definition of eligible costs to include longer-term investments, such as equipment and workforce development, that were not previously eligible.

In summary, the bill:

- Establishes a program through USDA to provide grants to for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, and other entities to alleviate transportation-related economic barriers to biomass removal from hazardous fuels management activities.
- Requires applicants to demonstrate why byproducts of hazardous fuels management activities would not be utilized without the grant.
- Allows grants to support:
 - Transportation of hazardous fuels to processing facilities.
 - Costs associated with woodyards, loading facilities, scales, and custom chipping
 - Purchase, lease, maintenance, or modification of equipment that facilitate the transport of hazardous fuels.
 - Workforce development, including training and certifications.
- Prioritizes projects that would treat hazardous fuels in high-risk firesheds, support development or expansion of wood processing facilities, and encourage collaboration among industrial, state/local, and/or tribal partners.
- Authorizes \$25 million in funding, consistent with previous appropriations, annually for 2026 through 2030 with a \$3 million cap per award, of which up to \$250,000 of an award may be used for the purchase of equipment. Grants provide a federal cost-share of 75%, except for Tribes, which are eligible for a 90% federal cost-share.

By addressing the transportation bottleneck that limits biomass utilization, the Hazardous Fuels Transportation Assistance Act strengthens wildfire mitigation efforts, supports rural forest economies, and improves the effectiveness of hazardous fuels treatments on USFS lands.

¹ Nicholls, D.L., et al. (2018) Socioeconomic Constraints to Biomass Removal from Forest Lands for Fire Risk Reduction in the Western U.S. *Forests*, 9(5), 264.

² Pan, F., et al. (2008) Production and cost of harvesting, processing, and transporting small-diameter (≤ 5 inches) trees for energy. *Forest Products Journal*, 58(5): 47-53.

³ Springsteen, B., et al. (2015) Forest biomass diversion in the Sierra Nevada: Energy, economics and emissions. *California Agriculture*, 69(3):142-149.