



Building Public Policy Engagement

FRA provides an effective member voice in Washington, DC, defending against threatening legislation and regulation, and advancing public policies that support industry sustainability.

FRA's Strategic Plan identifies several key priorities for its advocacy on behalf of the industries we serve. Our efforts in 2019 were multi-faceted and targeted those legislative and regulatory priorities.

Guestworker Visas

Seasonal non-immigrant guestworker reform remains a top advocacy priority for FRA members. The forest products industry relies heavily on foreign guestworkers to supplement our U.S. workforce to sustain forests, collect pine straw, improve timber stands, and manage vegetation. Because this work is usually seasonal, and because tree planting crews are itinerant without connection to a community, domestic workers are typically not interested in these 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 of 66,000 visas by two to three times.

In order to address the guestworker visa issue in 2019, FRA:

- Was successful in getting the Department of Homeland Security to release additional H-2B visas in FY2020.
- Serves on the H-2B Coalition Steering Committee representing forestry.
- Met with Department of Labor (DOL) leadership to review the importance of the H-2B visa nonimmigrant labor program to the forest products industry.
- Assisted in getting H2-B cap relief included in the FY2020 final spending bill.
- Coordinated the industry response in opposition to the DOL H-2A proposed rulemaking that would move forestry activities from H-2B to the H-2A visa program.
- Provided a solution-based strategy to address the problems with H-2A for forestry.
- Met with House and Senate members to advocate for meaningful change to H-2B visa allotment, resulting in passed legislation.

Transportation

One of FRA's goals is to identify solutions through legislation that will address transportation challenges which includes safety, inefficiencies, and labor shortages.

Safe Routes Act

On the transportation front, FRA had success in drafting and having the bipartisan Safe Routes Act (HR 2453) introduced by Congressman Mike Gallagher (R-WI-8). FRA also worked with Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) to introduce the bill in the Senate. This legislation allows trucks transporting raw forest products access to the safer U.S. Interstate System at state legal weight tolerances and vehicle configurations that are traveling a distance not greater than 150 air-miles from origin to a processing facility or storage yard. The bill additionally provides for state-legal weight tolerance in effect on the enactment date of the legislation. This assures the U.S. Department of Transportation that states cannot arbitrarily raise their weight limits after the bill is passed into law.

In order to advance the Safe Routes Act in Congress in 2019, FRA:

- Successfully worked with the American Loggers Council to build a partnership to address trucking issues from the woods to the mills.
- Met with key congressional leaders and staff to advocate for this issue.
- Joined with the Georgia Forestry Foundation to support research by the University of Georgia, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, that will address safety, environmental, and efficiency benefits of allowing log trucks access to the interstate at legal state weight limits and configurations. Successfully added three states to the research which will provide a broader perspective across the Southeastern U.S.
- Met with Chairman Peter DeFazio's (D-OR-4) Transportation and Infrastructure Committee staff and discussed the benefits of the Safe Routes Act.
- Coordinated letters to House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Senate Commerce, Transportation and Science Committee leadership. Letters were supported by 66 forestry associations at the national and state level.
- Created grassroots efforts to advance legislation for inclusion in the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act for FY2021. The current Surface Transportation Acts expires October 1, 2020.

Drive Safe Coalition

In 2019, FRA was a member of the DRIVE Safe Coalition, whose goal is to increase the number of drivers in the transportation industry through the creation of an apprenticeship program for young drivers. Once additional training is completed, drivers 18-20 years old would be allowed to drive on the interstate. FRA is working with the Drive Safe Coalition to garner additional cosponsors of the bipartisan legislation.

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

FRA prepared and provided comments on the rulemaking efforts of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) that would benefit log truck drivers. The comments were in support of the proposed changes to the short-haul exception. The changes would increase the short-haul distance from 100 to 150 air miles and increase the on-duty time from 12-14 hours. The FMCSA is currently reviewing the public comments that were received. A final rule is expected in the second quarter of 2020.

Additionally, FRA worked with the Agricultural and Food Transporters Conference to include raw forest products in the definition of agriculture commodities in comments that were submitted to the FMCSA on an advance notice of proposed rulemaking. If forestry is included in the final definition of an agricultural commodity, it would allow raw forest products to be transported 150 air miles and be exempt from the Electronic Logging Device (ELD) requirements. The FMCSA is reviewing public comment and will determine if the comments received support a proposed rulemaking effort.

Forest Based Biomass

The concept of biomass carbon neutrality (net zero carbon emissions) is grounded in the fact that carbon emissions from biomass combustion are fully offset by working forest landscapes that continually absorb carbon from the atmosphere. It is a basic cycle of growth, combustion and regrowth. What drives this cycle is the forest products industry's commitment to sustainability. Because of the ongoing efforts of our sector, there are more trees in the U.S. today than there were in 1952. In fact, forest volume has expanded in the U.S. over that time frame because of sustainable forest management that includes growing and maintaining healthy forests, sustainable harvesting to make renewable forest products and bioenergy, and replanting and regeneration to renew the cycle.

The carbon neutral nature of biomass harvested from sustainably-managed forests has been recognized repeatedly by studies, government agencies, institutions, legislation and rules around the world, including guidance from the United Nations (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(IPCC) and the reporting protocols of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In 2019, FRA:

- Successfully met with congressional offices to advocate for language in appropriations that protects the definition of carbon neutral forest-based biomass.
- Assured that biomass carbon neutrality for FY2020 was included in final spending bills directing federal agencies to recognize forest-based biomass as carbon neutral in energy projects.
- Continued support of Biomass 101 and moved forward with identifying the audience for an educational campaign on the merits of the carbon neutrality of woody biomass and correcting the media reporting with the facts.

Other Priorities

In 2019, FRA continued to advance grassroots and advocacy opportunities for our members; worked closely with strategic allies to address policy priorities; and coordinated, reviewed, and submitted comments on agency rulemaking that impacts the forest products industry.

Towards these priorities, in 2019 FRA:

- Coordinated the FRA member Legislative Fly-In to provide our members an opportunity to meet with their elected representatives and advocate for a stronger forest industry supply chain.
- Worked with allied associations to include funding in the disaster relief bill that would provide financial assistance to forest landowners impacted by natural disasters.
- Forged a relationship with the American Trucking Associations. This has proved to be a beneficial resource on transportation policy and regulations that impact the forest products industry.
- Reviewed and provided comments on agency rulemaking efforts that impact the forest products industry. These included: Endangered Species Act, Water of the U.S., Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act revisions, Affordable Clean Energy Rule, expanding the young driver pilot program to non-military personnel, and the Hours of Service Short-Haul Exception.
- Led in the coordination of the forest industry communications on the development of the Lake States Region Bat Habitat Conservation Plan.
- Implemented multiple grassroots efforts to advance FRA policy priorities.

FRA Priority Issues on the Horizon

In 2020, FRA will:

- Work to advance Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations language that provides the authority to DHS in consultation with DOL to provide additional H-2B visas to meet the demands of employers.
- Advance H-2B authorization legislation that assures enough H-2B visas are available for employers who depend on non-immigrant seasonal labor.
- Continue to work to have the Safe Routes Act language included in the Surface Transportation bill or as a standalone measure.
- Monitor and report to members the DOL final rulemaking on changes to the H-2A program that were opposed by FRA.
- Continue to serve as lead on the Lake States Region Habitat Conservation Plan.
- Monitor and provide comments on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) rulemaking efforts to reevaluate the listing status of the northern long-eared. Assess impacts to FRA members.
- Monitor transportation rulemaking on Hours of Service proposed changes.
- Promote forest products and sustainable forest management as part of any climate change framework or legislation.
- Monitor EPA rulemaking that recognizes carbon neutrality of forest-based biomass.
- Work to advance the Trillion Trees Act introduced by Congressman Bruce Westerman (R-AR-4) which emphasizes the importance of sustainably managed forests and the products they produce.
- Work with the FRA Public Policy and Advocacy Committee to develop a position to address climate change legislation.
- Monitor and advance or defend against public policies that impact FRA members.