

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT



Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was signed into law on November 15, 2021, and provided approximately \$5.5 billion to Forest Service (FS) to work with Federal, Tribal, State, and local government partners, as well as members of the public, to restore ecosystems and reduce wildfire risk to communities. Of that \$5.5 billion, \$1 billion of this funding was provided for the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) Program. IIJA required the Secretary of Agriculture to establish CWDG within 180 days after enactment. Under CWDG, the Secretary of Agriculture, in cooperation with the States, shall award funds to assist at-risk communities and Indian Tribes with planning for and mitigating against the risk created by wildfire. We are issuing this report to share information, promote transparency, and identify how the FS plans to use the IIJA funding.



Figure 1. A home that survived the Holiday Farm Fire in 2020 due to mitigation work done by the Oregon Department of Forestry completed with Federal grant funding. Oregon Department of Forestry photo by Jenna Trentadue. Used with permission from the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Inspection 08801-0002-24(IN1) – April 2023

Key CWDG Terms

An **At-Risk Community** is: (1) An interface community as defined in the [Federal Register] notice, “Wildland Urban Interface Communities Within the Vicinity of Federal Lands That Are at High Risk From Wildfire,” or (2) A group of homes and other structures with basic infrastructure and services at risk from wildfire as recognized by a state, regional, or national wildfire risk assessment, in which herbaceous or woody fuel conditions in and adjacent to the community are conducive to a wildland fire disturbance event which threatens human life or values-at-risk.

A **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** is a plan for an at-risk community that is developed within the context of the collaborative agreements and the guidance established by the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and agreed to by the applicable local government, local fire department, and State agency responsible for forest management, in consultation with interested parties and the Federal land management agencies managing land in the vicinity of the at-risk community; identifies and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommends the types and methods of treatment on Federal and non-Federal land that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure; and recommends measures to reduce structural ignitability throughout the at-risk community

The **Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)** is an area within or adjacent to an “at-risk community” that is identified in recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, or is any area for which a Community Wildfire Protection Plan is not in effect but is within ½ mile of the boundary of an “at risk community.” A WUI is also any area that is within 1 ½ miles of an “at risk community” and has sustained steep slopes that may affect wildfire behavior or has a geographic feature that aids in creating an effective fuel break or is in fuel condition class 3. An area adjacent to evacuation routes for an “at risk community” is another example of a WUI.

About the Community Wildfire Defense Grant

According to the [CWDG website](#),¹ these grants help communities in the WUI implement the three goals of the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy \(Cohesive Strategy\)](#).^{2, 3} The United States Department of Interior, the United States Department of Agriculture, Tribal Nations, and State forest agencies and local governments work together to carry out the responsibilities of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

- **Restore and Maintain Landscapes:** Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances, in accordance with management objectives.
- **Create Fire-Adapted Communities:** Human populations and infrastructure can better withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.
- **Improve Wildfire Response:** All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.



Figure 2. For more information on the Cohesive Strategy, please refer to this video by the FS (Source: FS [YouTube Channel](#), last accessed on February 8, 2023).

The IJJA prioritizes at-risk communities in an area identified as having high or very high wildfire hazard potential, being low-income, or having been impacted by a severe disaster. The grants fund two primary project types: (1) developing and revising a CWPP; and (2) implementing projects described in a CWPP that is not more than 10 years old.

The following graphic shows the annual appropriation amount for CWDG as provided in the IJJA.



Figure 3. Annual Funding for FY 2022 Through 2026

In FY 2022, FS allocated \$5.97 million for salaries and expenses and \$32.64 million for FS Operations. In FY 2023, FS also allocated \$5.97 million for salaries and expenses and \$18.94 million

¹ [Forest Service, Community Wildfire Defense Grant \(www.fs.usda.gov\)](#), last visited Feb. 15, 2023.

² [Forest Service, The National Strategy: The Final Phase in the Development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy \(https://forestsandrangelands.gov\)](#), last visited Feb. 15, 2023.

³ United States Departments of Agriculture and Interior, *The National Strategy: The Final Phase in the Development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy* (Apr. 2014).

for FS Operations. IJA required FS to provide OIG with one-half of 1 percent of the funds made available for oversight between FY 2022 through 2026. The funding allocations for FY 2022 and FY 2023 are shown in Figures 4 and 5 below along with a detailed breakdown of CWDG funding.

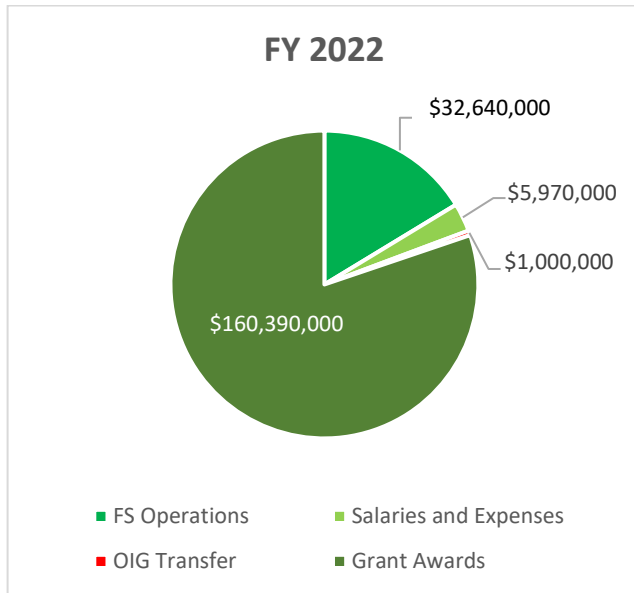


Figure 4. FY 2022 Funding Allocations

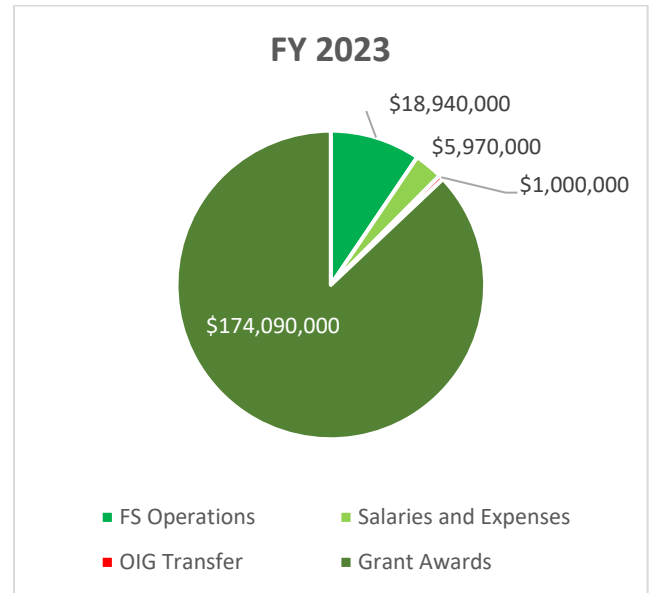


Figure 5. FY 2023 Funding Allocations

FS created a working group that held regular meetings beginning in February 2022 to discuss and plan the implementation of CWDG. In total, FS created four grant opportunities for FY 2022—one for each FS region (Southern, Western, and Northeastern/Midwestern), plus one for Indian Tribes/Alaska Native Corporations—and posted the grant opportunities to grants.gov on July 27, 2022. FS required applications to be submitted on grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. EST on October 7, 2022.⁴

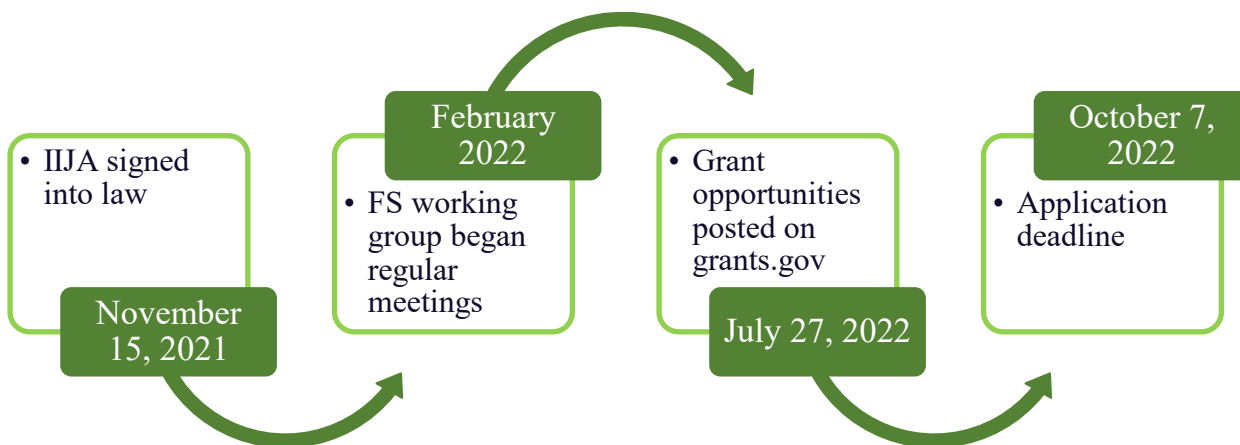


Figure 6. Timeline of Important CWDG Events

The maximum amount of funding that can be awarded to any one community or Indian Tribe is \$250,000 to develop or revise a CWPP, and \$10 million to implement projects described in a CWPP less than 10 years old. CWDG grant recipients are also required to provide matching funds of 10 percent for proposals to develop or revise a CWPP and 25 percent for proposals to implement projects

⁴ FS announced CWDG awards on March 20, 2023.

described in a CWPP. Communities that meet the definition of *underserved*⁵ may request a waiver of the matching requirement.



Figure 7. Eligible Applicants and Lands

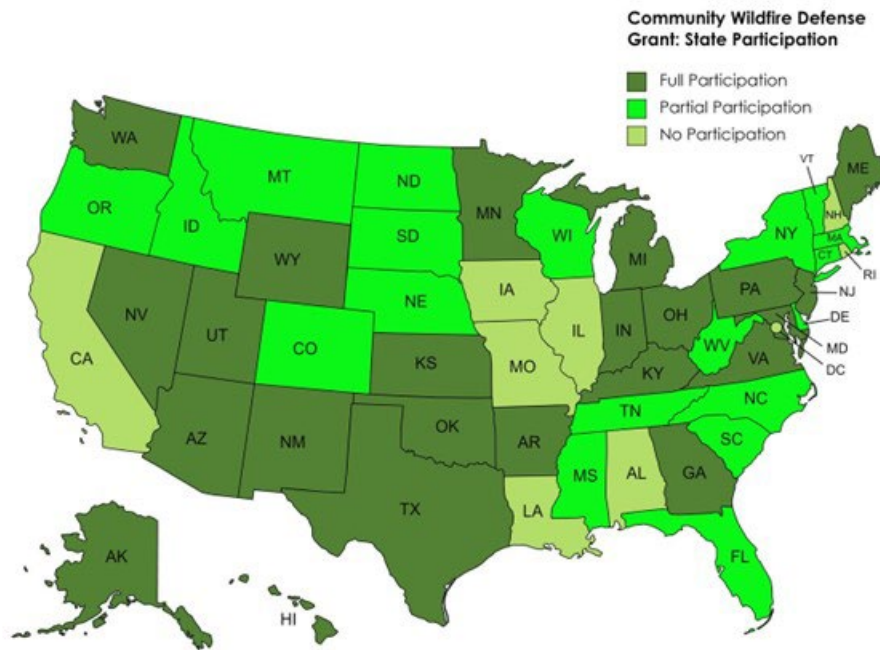
IIJA provides that CWDG funding should be awarded by USDA in cooperation with the States. FS offered State and territory forestry agencies the opportunity to assist with administering CWDG. Three levels of participation are available: full, partial, or none.

FS provided us with the following definitions for the three levels of participation and what they entail:

- **Full Participation:** The State/territory agreed to manage funding as pass-through grants.
- **Partial Participation:** The State/territory will not manage any pass-through grants, or subgrants, but will assist FS with outreach and education.
- **No Participation:** The State/territory will not participate at all in the CWDG program and FS will administer the program in the State.

Of the 59 States and territories across the 10 FS regions, 23 elected full participation, 22 elected partial participation, and 14 elected no participation. The level of participation elected by each State and territory can change each FY. Figure 8 shows the level of participation of each State for FY 2022. Territories are not shown on the map but are described in the caption below the map.

⁵ An underserved community is defined as “populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life . . .” Exec. Order 13985 (Jan. 20, 2021).



U.S. Territories (not shown)

- **No Participation:** Palau, Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and American Samoa.
- **Partial Participation:** Guam, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands.

Figure 3. State/Territory Participation

CWDG grant projects must be completed within 5 years. FS plans to award CWDG grants to eligible communities and Indian Tribes using a competitive process. Grant opportunities are used to solicit applications. Then, applications are reviewed and scored by members of regional panels. Regionally scored applications are compiled into a single nationally ranked list, which is used to distribute funding.



Figure 4. Steps to Award a Grant

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We conducted this work as part of our ongoing inspection with the objective to conduct integrated oversight of the funding provided to FS’ CWDG from IIJA. Specifically, we announced we would review program information for transparency and disclosure, perform data analytics on relative data sets for integrity and quality, inspect key aspects of the internal control environment, and review the implementation of the program. This report provides information related to reviewing program information for transparency and disclosure as well as program implementation.

To accomplish this part of our objectives, we identified the IIJA’s CWDG requirements and gained an understanding of the CWDG program through publicly available information, discussions with FS officials, and a review of documentation provided by FS. This report includes information about CWDG up to April 2023.

We are conducting our inspection in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency’s *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*.

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