

How will the 2020 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act impact forests and climate?

Graham Diedrich, Michigan State University Forest Carbon and Climate Program

Overview

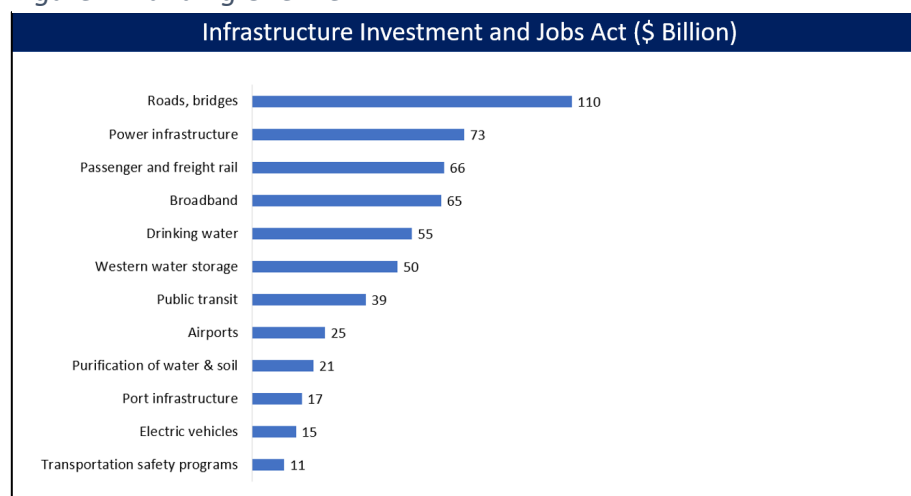
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), commonly referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, was recently signed into law on November 15, 2021. The approximately \$1.2 trillion-dollar package contains investments for environmental and natural resources projects. This overview breaks down major components to communicate linkages impacts to climate and forests.

Spending

To unpack the \$1.2 trillion-dollar portfolio, it is important to note that the upfront figure represents newly authorized spending and spending that was already authorized by Congress that year. In total, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act boosts \$550 billion in new spending over ten years.

As shown in Figure 1, the package makes investments in roads and bridges, power infrastructure, broadband, drinking water, airports, electric vehicles, and more.

Figure 1: Funding Overview¹



Although the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act focuses primarily on spending for traditional infrastructure improvements, the legislation also contains policies and programs designed to address climate change. The bill provides funding for clean energy transmission, climate resilience, electric vehicles, and reforestation and forest management programs.

Clean Energy Transmission

More than \$65 billion will be invested in order to facilitate the expansion of energy transmission lines, a crucial piece of green infrastructure.² The legislation creates a Grid Deployment Authority and Transmission Facilitation Fund to aid in the process.³ It also invests



in research and development for transmission and carbon sequestration technologies. Additionally, the bill authorizes the creation of a “technologically and economically feasible national strategy and roadmap to facilitate widescale production, processing, delivery, storage, and use of clean hydrogen,” through natural resources like woody biomass.³

Climate Resilience & Weatherization

The measure includes \$47 billion for climate resilience programs to help areas impacted by extreme weather events as a result of human-induced climate change. Existing organizations like the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will receive additional funding for construction projects and operational support.³ A special focus has been placed on wildfire management and flood risk prevention. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), a record number of climate-induced natural disasters led to \$95 billion in damages in 2020.⁴ Specifically, forest fires in California, Oregon, and Washington led to \$16.5 billion in damages.⁴

Electric Vehicles

The package provides \$7.5 billion to build a national network of charging stations for electric vehicles (EVs). According to Green Car Reports, such a buildout could more than triple the number of charging stations available nationwide to 500,000 EV chargers.⁵ The White House hopes to achieve this target by 2030.

Forests

Forests and forest management will be impacted by this bill in two crucial ways. First, it provides funding for natural resource improvements. For example, the IJA aims to tackle the growing logistical and operational costs of reforestation efforts by raising funding caps. It also provides funds for fire recovery and restoration and offers a national revegetation and seed strategy. Other funding includes \$3.4 billion in funding for wildfire risk reduction, \$2.3 billion for ecosystem restoration projects, and \$250 million for the Forest Service’s Legacy Road and Trail Program.⁶

Second, it seeks strengthens key tools used to fight forest fires. The IJA establishes a new statutory categorical exclusion for fuelbreaks, which are barriers used to slow the progression of wildfires. This means that the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management no longer need prepare environmental impact statement for these procedures, which in the past have slowed down or even ended fuelbreak efforts altogether.⁶

Criticism

There has been criticism from some environmental groups who claim that the bill does not going far enough to address the significant role of traditional infrastructure in addressing the climate crisis. Additionally, these groups claim that some elements of the bill exist to entrench fossil fuels as a primary energy source for years to come. Grassroots movements like Greenpeace USA and the Sunrise Movement have taken to referring to the package as “the Exxon Infrastructure Bill” in order to demonstrate the influence the fossil fuel and oil industry



played in crafting the legislation.^{7,0} According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the infrastructure bill energy provisions direct funding for traditional fossil fuels.⁸ Environmentalists also note that the package does not come close to delivering on President Biden's pledge to halve emissions by 2030.

Conclusions

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a \$1.2 trillion-dollar package that addresses traditional infrastructure investments and some climate and forest provisions. For example, the bill funds clean energy transmission, climate resiliency programs, charging stations for electric vehicles, and reforestation and forest management efforts. However, the bill has been criticized by environmental groups that claims it does too little to address climate change, and that the legislation contains pro-fossil fuel provisions. While the package will influence some elements of our climate in direct ways, the larger and more expansive Build Back Better Act would contain more ambitious and influential policies related to climate and the environment.

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