

Trump Administration Has Failed To Adequately Manage Forest Fires

DOI And USDA Faced Budget Cuts To Fire Management Programs And Services Under Trump

Forest Fire Management Has Seen Long Term Budget Cuts, Which Trump Has Done Little To Reverse

Forest Fire Management Has Seen Long Term Budget Cuts. “Forest fire management is a complex issue, but one thing is clear: the federal commitment to it has been declining for years, and Trump has done little to reverse it. The federal government’s spending on fire prevention has been shrinking; the budget for vegetation management fell from approximately \$240 million in 2001 to \$180 million in 2015, a decline of 24 percent.” [Politico, [09/15/20](#)]

- **Fewer Staff And Less Money Was Available To Reduce Risk And Instead Shifted To Just Fighting Fires.** “Along with this shift in resources, there has also been a corresponding shift in staff, with a 39 percent reduction in all staff other than firefighting personnel. As a result, the agency was forced to redirect dollars and staff focused on measures that could reduce the risk of fires by improving forest health. The more money spent on fighting fires, the less was available to prevent them.” [Politico, [09/15/20](#)]

Trump’s FY 2020 Budget Proposed Cutting \$948 Million From The Forest Service. “Subcommittee chair Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, joined with vice chair Sen. Tom Udall, D-New Mexico, in opposing Trump’s proposed \$948 million cut in the Forest Service budget for fiscal year 2020. [...] The Trump budget makes a 16 percent cut in grant funding for state wildfire action plans, cuts research funding by \$45 million and zeroes out funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Christiansen said fire experts are predicting this year’s wildfires could cost between \$1.6 billion and \$2.8 billion. Unfortunately, she has just \$1.7 billion for fire suppression before the fiscal 2020 budget takes effect.” [Missoula Current, [05/16/19](#)]

- **McClatchy DC: “President Donald Trump Says In His Budget That He’s Asking For The Highest Amount Ever For Certain Wildfire Prevention Programs. His Proposal Actually Contains Less Money For Wildfire Prevention Efforts Than The Current Federal Spending Plan.”** “President Donald Trump says in his budget that he’s asking for the highest amount ever for certain wildfire prevention programs. His proposal actually contains less money for wildfire prevention efforts than the current federal spending plan. It’s a small difference, just \$6 million out of about \$1.4 billion for wildfire prevention programs managed by the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. [...] He’s asking for \$920 million — \$21 million less than the current budget — for the department’s wildland fire management budget. He’s also proposing to reroute more money from that fund to cover fuel management activities and increase spending on forest products, which specifically deals with timber harvesting.” [McClatchy DC, [03/13/19](#)]

FY 2021 Forest Service Explanatory Notes: “2021 Forest Service Budget For Discretionary Appropriations Is \$5.3 Billion, A Decrease Of \$155.6 Million From The FY 2020 Enacted Amount.” “The Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Forest Service budget for discretionary appropriations is \$5.3 billion, a decrease of \$155.6 million from the FY 2020 Enacted amount.” [FY 2021 Forest Service Explanatory Notes, page 109, accessed [09/18/20](#)]

Programmatic Cuts Plagued Fire Research

The Fire Science Budget Has Experienced Cuts Since 2016, Which Trump Attempted To “Eliminate It Altogether.” “But the country’s top fire science budget has been slashed - cuts that began in the last year of the Obama administration and have only accelerated under President Trump, who has twice tried unsuccessfully to eliminate it altogether.” [*Washington Post*, [09/16/20](#)]

- **Joint Fire Science Program Through Interior & Ag Faced Budget Cuts.** “The budget for the Joint Fire Science Program, which is funded through the Interior and Agriculture departments and produces research on the best practices for fire prevention and management, has steadily declined since the mid-2000s. In a 2017 budget deal approved before the current administration, the program’s funding was reduced from \$12.9 million to \$8.9 million. In 2018 and 2019, the White House sought to eliminate it entirely. The program now receives \$6 million a year.” [*Washington Post*, [09/16/20](#)]

There Were Proposed Revisions That Could Limit Environmental Review Of Forest Projects Under Trump. “The U.S. Forest Service, under Chief Vicki Christiansen, is proposing revisions to its National Environmental Policy Act regulations that could limit environmental review and public input on projects ranging from forest health and wildfire mitigation to infrastructure upgrades to commercial logging on federal land.” [*NPR*, [06/12/19](#)]

Federal Forests Have Faced Particularly Severe Wildfires In Recent Years

Federal-Controlled Land Has Been Facing Wildfires

Federal Government Owns A Majority Of Land In The West. “As residents of the region know well, huge swaths of the American West are federally owned. Nearly 60 percent of the forests in California, 25 percent of the forests in Oregon, and 44 percent in Washington are national forests. For the most part, the forests burning across the West—the fires the president blames on state officials—are on federal lands.” [*Politico*, [09/15/20](#)]

- **Politico: “For The Most Part, The Forests Burning Across The West—The Fires The President Blames On State Officials—Are On Federal Lands.”** [*Politico*, [09/15/20](#)]

Of The 33 Million Acres Of Forest In California, Federal Agencies Own And Manage 57%. “Of the approximately 33 million acres of forest in California, federal agencies (including the USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service) own and manage 19 million acres (57%). State and local agencies including CalFire, local open space, park and water districts and land trusts own another 3%. 40% of California’s forestland is owned by families, Native American tribes, or companies. Industrial timber companies own 5 million acres (14%). 9 million acres are owned by individuals with nearly 90% of these owners having less than 50 acres of forest land.” [University Of California Agriculture And Natural Resources, accessed [09/18/20](#)]

- **Yet Trump Blamed California Forest Management For The Forest Fires.** “Trump last weighed in on the devastating fires in California in the middle of August, when another round of blazes was burning north of the Bay Area. His familiar response was to blame the state’s forest management.” [*CNN*, [09/10/20](#)]
- **Trump: “Every year, as the fire’s rage & California burns, it is the same thing-and then he comes to the Federal Government for \$\$\$ help. No more. Get your act together Governor.”** [Twitter, @realDonaldTrump, [11/03/19](#)]

Wildfires Have Gotten More Severe And Impactful

2020: Washington Post: “3.2 Million Acres In California Have Been Incinerated — Almost Double The Previous Record Of 1.9 Million, Set In 2018.” “As of Tuesday, 3.2 million acres in California have been incinerated — almost double the previous record of 1.9 million, set in 2018. In Oregon, blazes have erupted in parts of the wet Western Cascades that have not burned in years.” [*Washington Post*, [09/16/20](#)]

2020: Governor Inslee Said 330,000 Acres Had Burned Across Washington, More than What Burned IN Each Of The Last 12 Fire Seasons. “Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington said on Tuesday that an estimated 330,000 acres had burned across the state on Monday, more than what burned in each of the last 12 fire seasons.” [*New York Times*, [09/08/20](#)]

2020: Record Setting August And Kiln Like Conditions In California Resulted In Worse And More Unpredictable Fires. “It is not just the scale or frequency of fires that has changed — it is their behavior. Extreme heat, such as the record-setting August and ‘kiln-like’ conditions in California over Labor Day weekend, sets the stage for fires that burn hotter and more unpredictably. The intensity of the blazes creates towering plumes of heat called pyrocumulus clouds, which in turn trigger lightning storms and swirling fire tornadoes. Powerful winds push fires farther and faster than firefighters are used to.” [*Washington Post*, [09/16/20](#)]

There Has Been An Increase Of People Living In Wildland-Urban Areas That Are At Higher Risk For Wildfires. “Wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas – where houses and other development meet or mix with undeveloped natural areas – are places of transition and change. [...] Our recent study found that WUI grew rapidly from 1990 to 2010 in the U.S., expanding from 30.8 to 43.4 million homes (a 41% increase), covering from 581,000 to 770,000 km² (33% growth), making it the fastest growing land use type in the conterminous U.S.” [US Forest Service, [07/16/18](#)]

COVID Has Aggravated Budget Issues & FEMA

California State Wildfire Fighting Budget Has Struggled Due To COVID. “California has funded its own projects on forest health and wildfire readiness through its cap-and-trade program. But the budget shortfall created by the coronavirus crisis caused the state to put many programs on hold.” [*Washington Post*, [09/16/20](#)]

FEMA Set Aside \$44B From Its Disaster Relief Fund For The \$300 Unemployment Benefit. “Under Trump’s Aug. 8 executive memo, FEMA set aside \$44 billion from the disaster relief fund to help pay for the extra benefit. So far, the agency has paid out \$30 billion of that limited pot, to the 48 states, plus Guam and the District of Columbia, that were approved for the program.” [*Politico*, [09/10/20](#)]

- **Disaster Relief Money is Used To Finance The Fire Management Assistance Grants.** “The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) authorized the use of federal funds to help with firefighting costs for the Brattain Fire burning in Lake County, Oregon. [...] FEMA Region 10 Administrator Mike O’Hare determined that the fire threatened to cause such destruction as would constitute a major disaster, and on Saturday he approved the state of Oregon’s request for a federal Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG). [...] FMAGs are provided through the President’s Disaster Relief Fund and are made available by FEMA to assist in fighting fires that threaten to cause a major disaster.” [FEMA, [09/12/20](#)]
- **Same Pot For FEMA.** “Hurricane Laura could put an even quicker end to President Donald Trump’s temporary \$300 weekly jobless aid. [...] “It all comes out of one pot,” said Lars Anderson, a former Federal Emergency Management Agency official during the Obama administration.” [CBS News, [08/27/20](#)]

Trump Has Withheld Funding For Wildfires In The Past

Trump Allegedly Withheld Wildfire Disaster Relief Money For Political Reasons. “The former chief of staff at the Department of Homeland Security claims in a political ad released Monday that President Trump tried to withhold disaster relief money for California’s wildfires because voters in the state opposed him politically. “He told us to stop giving money to people whose houses had burned down from a wildfire because he was so rageful that people in the state of California didn’t support him and that politically it wasn’t a base for him,” Miles Taylor, who left the Trump administration in 2019, claims in the ad.” [*Los Angeles Times*, [08/17/20](#)]

USDA Withheld Money From CA To Reimburse The State For Fighting Of 2018 Wildfires. “As California prepares for what some officials fear will be another devastating fire season, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Forest Service are withholding reimbursements that state fire agencies say are owed for battling wildfires on federal lands last year. [...] Since 1961, the Forest Service has reimbursed the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, or Cal OES, for the costs of local, state and volunteer firefighters who help battle blazes on federal lands. Under the current assistance agreement, which runs from 2015 to 2020, the state calculates those costs by averaging the salaries, benefits and other indirect expenses tied to the work of firefighters, according to Cal OES Fire Chief Brian Marshall. [...] As a result of the audit, the federal government is now withholding more than \$9 million of the original \$72 million reimbursement request. Some of that money, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire, is reportedly owed to the Los Angeles County Fire Department.” [*Los Angeles Times*, [05/22/19](#)]

Trump Has Put The Timber Industry First

Trump And Appointees Have Crafted A Narrative That Forest Protection Efforts Are Responsible For Wildfires. “The messaging plan was crafted in support of Donald Trump’s pro-industry arguments for harvesting more timber in California, which he says would thin forests and prevent fires – a point experts refute. [...] The records offer a look behind the scenes at how Trump and his appointees have tried to craft a narrative that forest protection efforts are responsible for wildfires, including in California, even as science shows fires are becoming more intense largely because of climate change.” [*The Guardian*, [01/24/20](#)]

Experts Said Logging Wouldn’t Necessarily Help Prevent Or Lessen Wildfires, but Might Negate The Forests Abilities To Absorb Carbon Dioxide. “When forests burn, they do emit greenhouse gases. But one expert said the numbers the interior department put forth are significant overestimates. They say logging wouldn’t necessarily help prevent or lessen wildfires. On the contrary, logging could negate the ability of forests to absorb carbon dioxide humans are emitting at record rates.” [*The Guardian*, [01/24/20](#)]

Murkowski Held Up Wildfire Funding For Special Timber Interests. “The old-growth timber industry’s fight for survival in Alaska may be complicating congressional efforts to reach a long-term solution to costly wildfires. Senate aides and lobbyists told E&E News that Sen. Lisa Murkowski’s focus on protecting southeast Alaska’s shrinking old-growth timber business is one potential wrinkle as lawmakers balance environmental and forest industry interests in search of a compromise, possibly in a spending bill covering the rest of this fiscal year. [...] For Wyden and many other lawmakers, the top priority is ending the Forest Service’s practice of moving money out of nonfire-related accounts to cover rising wildfire costs. [...] Wildfire suppression takes up more than half the Forest Service’s budget, up from 16 percent in 1995. Wyden’s legislation would base annual wildfire funding on a frozen 10-year average of those costs — preventing its climb — while establishing a disaster fund for costs beyond that amount.” [*E&E News*, [01/26/18](#)]

Trump's FY 2020 And 2021 Massively Cut Funding For Forest Service Wildland Fire Activities From 2019 Levels

Between 2019 And 2021 Trump Cut Funding For Forest Service Wildland Fire Activities By Nearly \$600 Million

FY 2021 Forest Service Budget For Wildland Fire Activities Was Roughly \$600 Million Less Than 2019

FOREST SERVICE

Table NRE-1. FS Budget Authority (millions of dollars)

Item	2019 Actual	2020 Enacted	2021 Budget
Discretionary:			
Forest and Rangeland Research	\$300	\$305	\$249
State and Private Forestry	337	347	217
National Forest System:			
Hazardous Fuels Reduction	435	445	510
Forest Products	368	373	385
Law Enforcement Operations	131	131	133
Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness	260	262	264
Other NFS Activities	744	746	713
Total, NFS	1,938	1,958	2,005
Wildland Fire Activities:			
Preparedness	1,340	1,340	1,398
Suppression	1,665	1,011	1,011
Total, Wildland Fire Activities	3,005	2,351	2,409
Capital Improvement and Maintenance	446	455	453
Land Acquisition accounts	73	80	0
Other Appropriations	5	6	10
Total, Discretionary Programs	6,105	5,500	5,345
Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund:			
Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund	0	1,950	2,040
Mandatory:			
Permanent Appropriations	816	497	496
Trust Funds	353	143	150
Total, Mandatory Programs	1,169	640	646
Proposed Legislation	0	0	60
Total, FS	7,274	8,090	8,091

[USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]

...While Simultaneously Recognizing 63 Million Acres Of NFS Lands And 70,000 Communities Were At Risk Of Uncharacteristically Severe Wildfires

USDA 2021 Budget Summary: “About 63 Million Acres Of NFS Lands And 70,000 Communities Are At Risk Of Uncharacteristically Severe Wildfires. Over The Last Ten Years, Across All Jurisdictions Nationwide, An Average Of More Than 64,000 Wildfires Burned About 6.5 Million Acres Of Federal, Tribal, State, And Private Land.” “About 63 million acres of NFS lands and 70,000 communities are at risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfires. Over the last ten years, across all jurisdictions nationwide, an average of more than 64,000 wildfires burned about 6.5 million acres of Federal, Tribal, State, and private land. The demand for effective wildland fire management grows more critical because the length of fire season is almost year-round in some areas, development in the Wildland Urban Interface continues unabated, and fuel loads are at high levels” [USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]

The Forest Service's Wildland Fire Management Activities Budget Remained At \$2.4 Billion

FY 2021 USDA Budget Proposed \$2.4 Billion For Forest Service Wildland Fire Management Activities.

“Through Wildland Fire Management (WFM), Forest Service protects life, property and natural resources on NFS lands, other federal lands, and an additional 20 million acres of non-federal lands under agreements. The Budget proposes \$2.4 billion for WFM activities. The Budget supports Preparedness at about \$1.4 billion to maintain an organization that ensures readiness capability and program leadership necessary for appropriate, risk informed, and effective responses to wildfires nationwide. The Forest Service continues to improve Preparedness budgeting by evaluating cost centers, eliminating redundancies, and ensuring more consistency in contracting for assets on wildfire incidents. The agency will also continue to right-size its aviation assets, evaluating the best mix of asset types and ownership models to provide the necessary aviation capability.” [USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]

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Trumps 2021 Budget Authority For USDA Was \$2 Billion Lower Than In 2020.

Trumps 2021 Budget Authority For USDA Was \$2 Billion Lower Than In 2020. “Under current law, the 2021 request for discretionary budget authority to fund programs and operating expenses is about \$23 billion, approximately \$4 billion less than 2020 enacted levels. This includes funding for Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Rural Development, Forest Service, food safety, research, and conservation programs. Funding for mandatory programs is estimated to be \$128 billion, \$3 billion more than 2020 enacted levels. Including negative receipts, offsetting collections, recoveries, etc., USDA is requesting a total of \$146 billion in 2021 available funds. Compared to FY 2020, this amount represents a \$16 billion decrease.”

Figure OV-1. USDA New Budget Authority



[USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]

Trump's 2021 USDA Budget Reduced Funding For Agriculture Disaster Assistance Programs

Trump's 2021 USDA Budget Reduced LFP Funding By \$12 Million And ELAP By \$6 Million.

Table FPAC-7. Supplemental Agricultural Disaster Assistance Outlays (millions of dollars)

Item	2019 Actual	2020 Estimate	2021 Budget
Commodity:			
LFP	\$288	\$492	\$480
LIP	50	33	28
TAP	15	32	26
ELAP	46	44	38
Total, Other CCC Programs	399	601	573
Total, Current Law	399	601	573
Proposed Legislation	-	-	-480
Total, Supplemental Agricultural Disaster Assistance	399	601	93

*The Budget includes proposals for changes to certain programs above.
Totals may not sum due to rounding.*

[USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]

- **The Livestock Forage Disaster Program Provided Compensations To Livestock Producers Who Suffered Grazing Losses To Fire ON Rangeland Managed By A Federal Agency.** “LFP provides compensation to livestock producers who have suffered grazing losses due to drought on land that is native or improved pastureland with permanent vegetative cover or is planted specifically for grazing. It also provides compensation to producers who have suffered grazing losses due to fire on rangeland managed by a Federal agency.” [USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]
- **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program Provided Assistance To Producers Who Suffered Losses Due To Wildfires Not Covered By Livestock Forage Disaster Program Or The Livestock Indemnity Program.** “ELAP provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farmraised fish for losses due to disease (including cattle tick fever), adverse weather, or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by LFP and LIP.” [USDA – 2021 Budget Summary, Accessed [9/18/20](#)]

Between 2019 And 2020 Trump Cut Funding For Forest Service Wildland Fire Activities By Nearly \$700 Million

In The FY 2020 USDA Budget Trump Cut Forest Service's Wildland Fire Activities From \$3 to \$2.35 Billion

FOREST SERVICE

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Trump’s 2020 Budget Proposal Cuts USDA Funding By 15%

My Wabash Valley: “President Trump’s Budget Outline For The 2020 Fiscal Year Is Proposing A 15 Percent Cut In Funding To The Us Department Of Agriculture.” “President Trump’s budget outline for the 2020 Fiscal Year is proposing a 15 percent cut in funding to the US Department of Agriculture.” [My Wabash Valley, [3/24/19](#)]

New Food Economy: “USDA Has Been Allocated \$3.6 Billion For Fiscal Year 2020, Or 15 Percent Less Funding Than The Agency Is Estimated To Receive In 2019.” “As a whole, USDA has been allocated \$3.6 billion for fiscal year 2020, or 15 percent less funding than the agency is estimated to receive in 2019.” [New Food Economy, [3/12/19](#)]

Administration's Proposed 2020 USDA Budget Cut Funding For Research

USDA's Budget Proposal Summary Emphasizes The Importance Of Funding Research...

USDA 2020 Budget Summary: "The Budget Includes \$2.9 Billion To Support Research To Advance The Competitiveness Of U.S. Agriculture And Promote Food Security." "The Budget includes \$2.9 billion to support research to advance the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture and promote food security." [USDA – 2020 Budget Summary, Accessed [4/15/19](#)]

...But Proceeds To Cut Funding For Research Across Multiple Programs

The USDA 2020 Budget Would Cut \$45 Million In Forest And Rangeland Research Money. "Forest and rangeland research money would be cut by \$45 million, and money for research in recreation, bioenergy and urban stewardship would be reduced or eliminated." [Politico, [3/19/19](#)]

The USDA 2020 Budget Would Reduce Or Eliminate Money For Research In Recreation, Bioenergy And Urban Stewardship. "Forest and rangeland research money would be cut by \$45 million, and money for research in recreation, bioenergy and urban stewardship would be reduced or eliminated." [Politico, [3/19/19](#)]

The USDA 2020 Budget Would Eliminate Forest Service Research Positions. "Forest Service research would also see positions eliminated as part of a White House proposal to 'reorient' the agency to focus on wildfire research and the Forest Inventory and Analysis program." [Politico, [3/19/19](#)]

The 2020 USDA Budget Proposed \$25 Million To Relocate USDA's Independent Research Agencies Outside Washington DC. "Additionally, the proposal allocates \$25 million toward the controversial relocation of USDA's independent research agencies outside of Washington, D.C., despite ongoing legislation to block the move." [New Food Economy, [3/12/19](#)]

- **The USDA Budget Would Include Funding For Only 160 Full Time Employees At ERS, Down From Its 2019 Estimate Of 329.** "ERS jobs would also be sharply reduced in number: The White House envisions a budget that includes money for 160 full-time employees at ERS, lowering the agency's total staff by more than 50 percent from its fiscal 2019 estimate of 329, though not all of those positions are currently filled." [Politico, [3/19/19](#)]

Administration's Proposed 2020 USDA Budget Eliminated Conservation Stewardship Program

Trump's 2020 Budget Would Eliminate The Conservation Stewardship Program. "The president's budget eliminates the Conservation Stewardship Program, one of most comprehensive policies designed to incentivize farmers to conserve land. Conservation programs would face \$8.9 billion in spending cuts over the next decade, Politico reports." [New Food Economy, [3/12/19](#)]

DOI Wildfire Management Budget Has Went Down From 2019 To 202

DOI Wildfire Management Budget Has Went Down From 2019 To 2020. *Note: FY2021 Request is Higher At Over \$1B.*

FY 2020 BUDGET REQUEST

The FY 2020 budget request for the DOI's WFM program is **\$919.9 million**.

FY 2020 Request

(Dollars in Thousands)

Program Budget	2018 Actual ^(a)	2019 CR Baseline	2020 Request
Current	\$ 948,087	\$ 948,087	\$ 919,908
<i>Supplemental Appropriation</i>	<i>\$50,000</i>		
Funding Total:	\$998,087	\$ 948,087	\$ 919,908
Cap Adjustment			[\$300,000]
Staffing			
FTEs ^(b)	3,825	3,825	3,809

Notes:

(a) The total includes an appropriation of \$50 million provided in the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Requirements Act, 2017 (P.L. 115-72) for repayment of funds transferred to USFS in 2017.

(b) The FTE amounts in this table include reimbursable FTE, which explains the difference from the FTE displayed in the Summary of Requirements table.

[DOI FY 2020 Budget Justification Wildland Fire Management, accessed [09/18/20](#)]

2019: DOI Faced Staffing Concerns – Short Hundreds Of Firefighters

DOI Was Understaffed In 2019 Due To Recruitment Problems And Government Shutdown. “Heading into the hottest and driest months of the wildfire season, the Department of the Interior is short hundreds of firefighters, a result of recruitment problems and the longest federal government shutdown in history. Based on interviews and internal agency memos obtained through a public records request, The Times found that the agency had at least 241 fewer seasonal firefighters available than expected.” [*Los Angeles Times*, [07/23/19](#)]