

107TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 352

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 23, 2002

Received and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully support the “Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment” as prepared by the Western Governors’ Association, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, and other stakeholders, to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wild-fire, and prepare a national assessment of prescribed burning practices to minimize risks of escape.

Whereas catastrophic wildfires not only cause environmental damage to forests and other lands but place the lives of firefighters at risk and pose threats to human health, personal property, sustainable ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and air and water quality;

Whereas upon completion of the 2001 wildfire season, 81,681 fires burned 3,555,138 acres, which threatened rural communities nationwide and killed 18 firefighters;

Whereas 8,422,237 acres burned during the 2000 wildfire season—equivalent to a 6-mile-wide area from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles, California—destroying 861 structures, killing 17 firefighters, and costing the Federal Government \$1,300,000,000 in suppression costs;

Whereas upon completion of the 1999 wildfire season, 93,702 fires burned 5,661,976 acres nationwide and killed 28 firefighters;

Whereas an April 1999 General Accounting Office report to the House of Representatives entitled “Western National Forests: A Cohesive Strategy is Needed to Address Catastrophic Wildfire Threats” (GAO/RCED–99–65) states that “The most extensive and serious problem related to the health of national forests in the interior West is the overaccumulation of vegetation, which has caused an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrollable and catastrophically destructive wildfires”;

Whereas an October 2000 Forest Service report entitled “Protecting People and Sustaining Resources in Fire-Adapted Ecosystems: A Cohesive Strategy”, in response to the 1999 General Accounting Office report, confirms the previous report’s conclusion and further warns that “Without increased restoration treatments..., wildfire suppression costs, natural resource losses, private property losses, and environmental damage are certain to escalate as fuels continue to accumulate and more acres become high-risk”;

Whereas the July 2001 General Accounting Office testimony entitled “The National Fire Plan: Federal Agencies Are Not Organized to Effectively and Efficiently Implement the Plan” (GAO–01–1022T) before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health reported that “The Federal Government’s decades-old policy of suppressing all wildland fires, including naturally occurring ones, have resulted in dangerous accumulations of hazardous fuels on Federal lands. As a result, conditions on 211,000,000 acres, or almost one-third of all Federal lands, continue to deteriorate” and “[t]he list of at-risk communities ballooned to over 22,000”;

Whereas the escaped prescribed burn that created the Cerro Grande Fire in May 2000, that consumed 48,000 acres and destroyed 400 homes with losses exceeding \$1,000,000,000 in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the escaped prescribed burn that created the Lowden Fire in 1999 that destroyed 23 homes in Lewiston, California, highlight the unacceptable risks of over reliance on prescribed burning by Federal land management agencies;

Whereas similar catastrophic wildfire resolutions were passed by the California Legislature (AJR 69) and Western Legislative Forestry Task Force (R00–1) in 2000 and Oregon (HJM 22), Idaho (SJM 104), Montana (HJ 22) in 2001, and South Dakota (HCR 1018) in 2002; and

Whereas in 2000, Congress provided an unprecedented \$2,900,000,000 in funding for wildlife firefighting agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior to prepare for future fire-suppression efforts and take proactive steps to reduce wildfire risk on all Federal lands: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring)*, That it is the sense of Congress that—

3 (1) in the interest of protecting the integrity
4 and posterity of United States forests and wildlands,
5 wildlife habitats, watersheds, air quality, human
6 health and safety, and private property, the Forest
7 Service and other Federal land management agen-
8 cies should—

9 (A) fully support the “Collaborative 10-
10 year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks
11 to Communities and the Environment” as pre-
12 pared by the Western Governors’ Association,
13 the Department of Agriculture, the Department
14 of the Interior, and other stakeholders, to re-
15 duce the overabundance of forest fuels that
16 place these resources at high risk of cata-
17 strophic wildfire;

18 (B) use an appropriate mix of fire preven-
19 tion activities and management practices, in-
20 cluding forest restoration, thinning of at-risk
21 forest stands, grazing, selective tree removal,
22 and other measures to control insects and
23 pathogens, removal of excessive ground fuels,
24 and prescribed burns;

1 (C) increase the role for private, local, and
2 State contracts for fuel reduction treatments on
3 Federal forest lands and adjoining private prop-
4 erties; and

5 (D) pursue more effective fire suppression
6 on Federal forest lands through increased fund-
7 ing of mutual aid agreements with professional
8 State and local public fire fighting agencies;

9 (2) in the interest of forest protection and pub-
10 lic safety, the United States Department of Agri-
11 culture and the Department of the Interior should
12 immediately prepare for public review a national as-
13 sessment of prescribed burning practices on public
14 lands to identify alternatives that will achieve land
15 management objectives to minimize risks associated
16 with prescribed fire; and

17 (3) results from the national assessment of pre-
18 scribed burning practices on public lands as de-
19 scribed in paragraph (2) should be incorporated into
20 any regulatory land use planning programs that pro

1 pose the use of prescribed fire as a management practice.

Passed the House of Representatives July 22, 2002.

Attest:

JEFF TRANDAHL,

Clerk.