

EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES SHOULD FULLY IMPLEMENT THE WESTERN GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION "COLLABORATIVE 10-YEAR STRATEGY FOR REDUCING WILDLAND FIRE RISKS TO COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT" TO REDUCE THE OVERABUNDANCE OF FOREST FUELS THAT PLACE NATIONAL RESOURCES AT HIGH RISK OF CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRE, AND PREPARE A NATIONAL PRESCRIBED FIRE STRATEGY THAT MINIMIZES RISKS OF ESCAPE

JUNE 11, 2002.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. HANSEN, from the Committee on Resources,
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H. Con. Res. 352]

The Committee on Resources, to whom was referred the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 352) expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully implement the Western Governors Association "Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment" to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, and prepare a National Prescribed Fire Strategy that minimizes risks of escape, having considered the same, report favorably thereon with amendments and recommend that the concurrent resolution be agreed to.

The amendments are as follows:

Amend the preamble to read as follows:

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 Ad-

dress 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 extitled “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 overreliance 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) and 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

Strike all after the resolving clause and insert the following:

That it is the sense of Congress that—

(1) in the interest of protecting the integrity and posterity of United States forests and wildlands, wildlife habitats, watersheds, air quality, human health and safety, and private property, the Forest Service and other Federal land management agencies should—

(A) fully implement 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 these resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire;

(B) use an appropriate mix of fire prevention activities and management practices, including forest restoration, thinning of at-risk forest stands, grazing, selective tree removal, and other measures to control insects and pathogens, removal of excessive ground fuels, and prescribed burns;

(C) increase the role for private, local, and State contracts for fuel reduction treatments on Federal forest lands and adjoining private properties; and

(D) pursue more effective fire suppression on Federal forest lands through increased funding of mutual aid agreements with professional State and local public fire fighting agencies;

(2) in the interest of forest protection and public safety, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior should immediately prepare for public review a national assessment of prescribed burning practices on public lands to identify alternatives that will achieve land management objectives to minimize risks associated with prescribed fire; and

(3) results from the national assessment of prescribed burning practices on public lands as described in paragraph (2) should be incorporated into any regulatory land use planning programs that propose the use of prescribed fire as a management practice.

Amend the title so as to read:

A 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 wildfire, and prepare a national prescribed fire strategy that minimizes risks of escape.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of H. Con. Res. 352 as ordered reported is to express 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 wildfire, and prepare a national assessment of prescribed burning practices to minimize risks of escape.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

During the 2001 wildfire season 81,681 fires burned 3,555,138 acres, killed 15 firefighters and threatened rural communities nationwide. More than 7.4 million acres burned during 2000, destroying 861 structures, killing 16 firefighters and costing the federal government \$1.3 billion in suppression costs. Catastrophic wildfire is the greatest threat facing our western national forests today. Ecological, social and economic values are at high risk of catastrophic wildfire on 211 million acres of federal lands nationwide. More than 22,000 communities are at risk to catastrophic wildfire.

The key to reducing risk of catastrophic wildfire is to actively manage forests to ensure they can withstand drought, insects and disease by achieving appropriate tree density and promoting native mixes of species. Reducing forest density and improving the ability of healthy forests to survive wildfires must be the number-one priority for federal forest managers. It is time to end catastrophic losses of wildlife habitat, forest resources, homes and communities and most importantly, human lives on all federal forest lands. Thinning practices necessary to ensure our forests are able to survive future catastrophic wildfires must begin without delay.

This resolution expresses the sense of Congress that federal land-management agencies should (1) fully support the Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment; and (2) immediately prepare a national assessment of prescribed burning practices on public lands to identify alternatives that will achieve all land-management objectives and minimize the risk associated with prescribed burning.

In August 2000, then-President Clinton directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to develop a response to severe wildland fires, reduce fire impacts on rural communities, and ensure effective firefighting capacity in the future. The result was the National Fire Plan, which Congress later supported through language in the Fiscal Year 2001 appropriations act for the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies. As part of its direction, Congress mandated several reporting requirements including the

creation of a coordinated national 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy. It also called on the Secretaries to work collaboratively and cooperatively with Governors in the development of this strategy and as partners in planning, decision-making, and implementation.

This resulting strategy has been developed by federal, State, tribal, local government and nongovernmental representatives. The purpose of the strategy is to improve the management of wildland fire and hazardous fuels, as well as meet the need for ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation in the United States on federal and adjacent State, tribal, and private forest and range lands. In addition, this strategy outlines a new collaborative framework to facilitate implementation of proactive and protective measures that are appropriate to reduce the risk of wildland fire to communities and the environments.

The primary goals of the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy are:

1. Improve Prevention and Suppression
2. Reduce Hazardous Fuels
3. Restore Fire Adapted Ecosystems
4. Promote Community Assistance

A detailed implementation plan will establish detailed and consistent operational ways of doing business between federal, State and tribal entities. These operations will ensure financial and other resources are available and utilized in an integrated, targeted, and cost effective manner and that legal and technical requirements are met. The implementation plan will also include a system to identify and promptly address implementation issues. This implementation plan is expected to be approved by the Western Governors Association, the Departments of Interior and Agriculture and other parties on May 23, 2002.

COMMITTEE ACTION

H. Con. Res. 352 was introduced on March 14, 2002, by Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA). The resolution was referred to the Committee on Resources, and within the Committee to the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health and the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands. On May 22, 2002, the Full Resources Committee met to consider the resolution. The Subcommittees were discharged from further consideration by unanimous consent. Mr. Pombo offered two technical amendments to correct minor errors and clarify points. They were adopted by unanimous consent. The resolution as amended was then ordered favorably reported to the House of Representatives by unanimous consent.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding clause 2(b)(1) of rule X and clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Resources' oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY STATEMENT

Article I, section 8 of the Constitution of the United States grants Congress the authority to adopt this resolution.

COMPLIANCE WITH HOUSE RULE XIII

1. Cost of Legislation. Clause 3(d)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires an estimate and a comparison by the Committee of the costs which would be incurred in carrying out this resolution. H. Con. Res. 352 is a sense of the Congress resolution and has no budgetary impact.

2. Congressional Budget Act. As required by clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, this resolution does not contain any new budget authority, spending authority, credit authority, or an increase or decrease in revenues or tax expenditures.

3. General Performance Goals and Objectives. This resolution does not authorize funding and therefore, clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives does not apply.

COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC LAW 104-4

This resolution contains no unfunded mandates.

PREEMPTION OF STATE, LOCAL OR TRIBAL LAW

This resolution is not intended to preempt any State, local or tribal law.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

This resolution would make no changes in existing law.

