

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 406

Expressing the sense of the Congress that Federal land management agencies should immediately enact a cohesive strategy to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels which places national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 22, 2000

Mr. RADANOVICH (for himself, Mr. CANNON, Mrs. CHENOWETH-HAGE, Mr. CONDIT, Mrs. CUBIN, Mr. DELAY, Mr. DOOLITTLE, Ms. DUNN, Mr. GIBBONS, Mr. GOODE, Mr. GOODLATTE, Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin, Mr. HANSEN, Mr. HASTINGS of Washington, Mr. HAYWORTH, Mr. HERGER, Mr. HILL of Montana, Mr. KNOLLENBERG, Mr. MCINNIS, Mr. NETHERCUTT, Mr. OSE, Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania, Mr. POMBO, Mr. SCHAFFER, Mr. SIMPSON, Mr. SKEEN, Mr. STUMP, Mr. STUPAK, Mr. TAYLOR of North Carolina, Mr. THOMAS, Mr. THUNE, Mr. TURNER, Mr. WALDEN of Oregon, Mrs. WILSON, and Mr. YOUNG of Alaska) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture, and in addition to the Committee on Resources, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the Congress that Federal land management agencies should immediately enact a cohesive strategy to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels which places national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire.

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 “[t]he 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 April 2000 United States 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 “[w]ithout 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 United States Forest Service further acknowledges that 39 million acres of national forest are at significant risk of catastrophic wildfire and an additional 26 million acres will be at similar risk due to increases in the mortality of trees and brush caused by insects and pathogens;

Whereas the National Research Council and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have recognized that catastrophic wildfires, such as those in California in 1993 and Florida in 1998, are among the defining United States natural disasters of the 1990’s;

Whereas catastrophic wildfires not only cause damage to the forests and other lands, but place the lives of firefighters

at risk and pose threats to human health, personal property, sustainable ecosystems, and air and water quality;

Whereas according to the National Fire Protection Association, wildland-urban interface catastrophic wildfires destroyed 9,925 homes between 1985 and 1994, and burned six million acres of public lands nationwide in 1999 alone, equivalent to a 3-mile-wide swath from the District of Columbia to Los Angeles, California;

Whereas the escaped Cerro Grande prescribed fire in May 2000, which consumed 48,000 acres and destroyed 400 homes with losses exceeding a billion dollars in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the escaped Lowden prescribed fire in 1999 that destroyed 23 homes in Lewiston, California, highlight the unacceptable risks of using prescribed burning as the sole forest fire management practice of Federal land management agencies;

Whereas as of September 14, 2000, more than 6.5 million acres have burned nationwide this year, with several months left in the 2000 fire season;

Whereas high-risk forest fuel has accumulated in combination with reduced fire response capability by Federal agencies during the 1990's, resulting in catastrophic wildfires becoming more difficult and expensive to extinguish, with a disproportionate burden being placed on State and local resources, while the costs to fight these fires have increased by 150 percent between 1986 and 1994, and the costs of maintaining a readiness force have increased by 70 percent between 1992 and 1997;

Whereas current planning efforts of the United States Forest Service, such as the Sierra Nevada Framework, Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, the

Roadless Initiative, and Federal monument proclamations, rely primarily on extensive use of prescribed fires, which will further exacerbate the risk of catastrophic wildfire on Federal lands throughout the West; and

Whereas on September 9, 2000, the President released a report, entitled “Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000”: Now, therefore, be it

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

3 (1) in the interest of protecting the integrity
4 and posterity of United States forest and wild lands,
5 wildlife habitat, watershed, air quality, human health
6 and safety, and private property, the United States
7 Forest Service and other Federal land management
8 agencies should—

9 (A) immediately enact a cohesive strategy
10 to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels
11 which place these resources at high risk of cata-
12 strophic wildfire;

13 (B) utilize an appropriate mix of fire sup-
14 pression activities and management methodolo-
15 gies, including selective thinning, selective har-
16 vesting, grazing, control of insects and patho-
17 gens, the removal of excessive ground fuels, and
18 small-scale prescribed burns, including in-

1 creased private, local, and State contracts for
2 prefire treatments on Federal forest lands; and
3 (C) pursue more effective fire suppression
4 in Federal forest lands through increased fund-
5 ing of mutual aid agreements with professional
6 State and local public firefighting agencies; and
7 (2) in the interest of forest protection and rural
8 community safety, the Departments of Agriculture
9 and the Interior immediately should prepare for pub-
10 lic review a national prescribed fire strategy for pub-
11 lic lands that creates a process for evaluation of
12 worst case scenarios for risk of escape and identifies
13 alternatives that will achieve the land management
14 objectives while minimizing the risk and use of pre-
15 scribed fire, which strategy should be incorporated
16 into any regulatory land use planning programs that
17 propose the use of prescribed fire as a management
18 practice.

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