

115TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 1873

To amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to enhance the reliability of the electricity grid and reduce the threat of wildfires to and from electric transmission and distribution facilities on Federal lands by facilitating vegetation management on such lands.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 4, 2017

Mr. LAMALFA (for himself, Mr. SCHRADER, Ms. CHENEY, Mr. COSTA, Mr. WESTERMAN, and Mr. O'HALLERAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Agriculture, 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

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## A BILL

To amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to enhance the reliability of the electricity grid and reduce the threat of wildfires to and from electric transmission and distribution facilities on Federal lands by facilitating vegetation management on such lands.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Electricity Reliability  
5 and Forest Protection Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT, FACILITY INSPECTION,**  
2 **AND OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE ON**  
3 **FEDERAL LANDS CONTAINING ELECTRIC**  
4 **TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION FACILI-**  
5 **TIES.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Title V of the Federal Land Pol-  
7 icy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1761 et seq.)  
8 is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

9 **“SEC. 512. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT, FACILITY INSPEC-**  
10 **TION, AND OPERATION, AND MAINTENANCE**  
11 **RELATING TO ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION AND**  
12 **DISTRIBUTION FACILITY RIGHTS-OF-WAY.**

13 “(a) GENERAL DIRECTION.—In order to enhance the  
14 reliability of the electricity grid and reduce the threat of  
15 wildfires to and from electric transmission and distribu-  
16 tion rights-of-way and related facilities and adjacent prop-  
17 erty, the Secretary, with respect to public lands and other  
18 lands under the jurisdiction of the Secretary, and the Sec-  
19 retary of Agriculture, with respect to National Forest Sys-  
20 tem lands, shall provide direction to ensure that all exist-  
21 ing and future rights-of-way, however established (includ-  
22 ing by grant, special use authorization, and easement), for  
23 electrical transmission and distribution facilities on such  
24 lands include provisions for utility vegetation manage-  
25 ment, facility inspection, and operation and maintenance  
26 activities that, while consistent with applicable law—

1           “(1) are developed in consultation with the  
2 holder of the right-of-way;

3           “(2) enable the owner or operator of a facility  
4 to operate and maintain the facility in good working  
5 order and to comply with Federal, State and local  
6 electric system reliability and fire safety require-  
7 ments, including reliability standards established by  
8 the North American Electric Reliability Corporation  
9 and plans to meet such reliability standards;

10          “(3) minimize the need for case-by-case or an-  
11 nual approvals for—

12                 “(A) routine vegetation management, facil-  
13 ity inspection, and operation and maintenance  
14 activities within existing electrical transmission  
15 and distribution rights-of-way; and

16                 “(B) utility vegetation management activi-  
17 ties that are necessary to control hazard trees  
18 within or adjacent to electrical transmission and  
19 distribution rights-of-way; and

20          “(4) when review is required, provide for exped-  
21 ited review and approval of utility vegetation man-  
22 agement, facility inspection, and operation and  
23 maintenance activities, especially activities requiring  
24 prompt action to avoid an adverse impact on human  
25 safety or electric reliability to avoid fire hazards.

1       “(b) VEGETATION MANAGEMENT, FACILITY INSPEC-  
2 TION, AND OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE PLANS.—

3           “(1) DEVELOPMENT AND SUBMISSION.—Con-  
4 sistent with subsection (a), the Secretary and the  
5 Secretary of Agriculture shall provide owners and  
6 operators of electric transmission and distribution  
7 facilities located on lands described in such sub-  
8 section with the option to develop and submit a  
9 vegetation management, facility inspection, and op-  
10 eration and maintenance plan, that at each owner or  
11 operator’s transmission discretion may cover some or  
12 all of the owner or operator’s transmission and dis-  
13 tribution rights-of-way on Federal lands, for ap-  
14 proval to the Secretary with jurisdiction over the  
15 lands. A plan under this paragraph shall enable the  
16 owner or operator of a facility, at a minimum, to  
17 comply with applicable Federal, State, and local elec-  
18 tric system reliability and fire safety requirements,  
19 as provided in subsection (a)(2). The Secretaries  
20 shall not have the authority to modify those require-  
21 ments.

22           “(2) REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS.—The  
23 Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture shall  
24 jointly develop a consolidated and coordinated proc-  
25 ess for review and approval of—

1           “(A) vegetation management, facility in-  
2           spection, and operation and maintenance plans  
3           submitted under paragraph (1) that—

4                   “(i) assures prompt review and ap-  
5                   proval not to exceed 90 days;

6                   “(ii) includes timelines and bench-  
7                   marks for agency comments to submitted  
8                   plans and final approval of such plans;

9                   “(iii) is consistent with applicable law;  
10                  and

11                  “(iv) minimizes the costs of the proc-  
12                  ess to the reviewing agency and the entity  
13                  submitting the plans; and

14           “(B) amendments to the plans in a prompt  
15           manner if changed conditions necessitate a  
16           modification to a plan.

17           “(3) NOTIFICATION.—The review and approval  
18           process under paragraph (2) shall—

19                   “(A) include notification by the agency of  
20                   any changed conditions that warrant a modi-  
21                   fication to a plan;

22                   “(B) provide an opportunity for the owner  
23                   or operator to submit a proposed plan amend-  
24                   ment to address directly the changed condition;  
25                  and

1           “(C) allow the owner or operator to con-  
2           tinue to implement those elements of the ap-  
3           proved plan that do not directly and adversely  
4           affect the condition precipitating the need for  
5           modification.

6           “(4) CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION PROCESS.—The  
7           Secretary and the Secretary of Agriculture shall  
8           apply his or her categorical exclusion process under  
9           the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42  
10          U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) to plans developed under this  
11          subsection on existing transmission and distribution  
12          rights-of-way under this subsection.

13          “(5) IMPLEMENTATION.—A plan approved  
14          under this subsection shall become part of the au-  
15          thorization governing the covered right-of-way and  
16          hazard trees adjacent to the right-of-way. If a vege-  
17          tation management plan is proposed for an existing  
18          transmission and distribution facility concurrent  
19          with the siting of a new transmission or distribution  
20          facility, necessary reviews shall be completed as part  
21          of the siting process or sooner. Once the plan is ap-  
22          proved, the owner or operator shall provide the agen-  
23          cy with only a notification of activities anticipated to  
24          be undertaken in the coming year, a description of

1 those activities, and certification that the activities  
2 are in accordance with the plan.

3 “(6) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

4 “(A) VEGETATION MANAGEMENT, FACIL-  
5 ITY INSPECTION, AND OPERATION AND MAINTEN-  
6 NANCE PLAN.—The term ‘vegetation manage-  
7 ment, facility inspection, and operation and  
8 maintenance plan’ means a plan that—

9 “(i) is prepared by the owner or oper-  
10 ator of one or more electrical transmission  
11 or distribution facilities to cover one or  
12 more electric transmission and distribution  
13 rights-of-way; and

14 “(ii) provides for the long-term, cost-  
15 effective, efficient and timely management  
16 of facilities and vegetation within the width  
17 of the right-of-way and adjacent Federal  
18 lands to enhance electricity reliability, pro-  
19 mote public safety, and avoid fire hazards.

20 “(B) OWNER OR OPERATOR.—The terms  
21 ‘owner’ and ‘operator’ include contractors or  
22 other agents engaged by the owner or operator  
23 of a facility.

24 “(C) HAZARD TREE.—The term ‘hazard  
25 tree’ means any tree inside the right-of-way or

1 located outside the right-of-way that has been  
2 found by either the owner or operator of a  
3 transmission or distribution facility, or the Sec-  
4 retary or the Secretary of Agriculture, to be  
5 likely to fail and cause a high risk of injury,  
6 damage, or disruption within 10 feet or less of  
7 an electric power line or related structure if it  
8 fell.

9 “(c) RESPONSE TO EMERGENCY CONDITIONS.—If  
10 vegetation on Federal lands within, or hazard trees on  
11 Federal lands adjacent to, an electrical transmission or  
12 distribution right-of-way granted by the Secretary or the  
13 Secretary of Agriculture has contacted or is in imminent  
14 danger of contacting one or more electric transmission or  
15 distribution lines, the owner or operator of the trans-  
16 mission or distribution lines—

17 “(1) may prune or remove the vegetation to  
18 avoid the disruption of electric service and risk of  
19 fire; and

20 “(2) shall notify the appropriate local agent of  
21 the relevant Secretary not later than 24 hours after  
22 such removal.

23 “(d) COMPLIANCE WITH APPLICABLE RELIABILITY  
24 AND SAFETY STANDARDS.—If vegetation on Federal  
25 lands within or adjacent to an electrical transmission or

1 distribution right-of-way under the jurisdiction of each  
2 Secretary does not meet clearance requirements under  
3 standards established by the North American Electric Re-  
4 liability Corporation, or by State and local authorities, and  
5 the Secretary having jurisdiction over the lands has failed  
6 to act to allow a transmission or distribution facility owner  
7 or operator to conduct vegetation management activities  
8 within 3 business days after receiving a request to allow  
9 such activities, the owner or operator may, after notifying  
10 the Secretary, conduct such vegetation management ac-  
11 tivities to meet those clearance requirements.

12       “(e) REPORTING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary or  
13 Secretary of Agriculture shall report requests and actions  
14 made under subsections (c) and (d) annually on each Sec-  
15 retary’s website.

16       “(f) LIABILITY.—An owner or operator of a trans-  
17 mission or distribution facility shall not be held liable for  
18 wildfire damage, loss or injury, including the cost of fire  
19 suppression, if—

20               “(1) the Secretary or the Secretary of Agri-  
21 culture fails to allow the owner or operator to oper-  
22 ate consistently with an approved vegetation man-  
23 agement, facility inspection, and operation and  
24 maintenance plan on Federal lands under the rel-  
25 evant Secretary’s jurisdiction within or adjacent to

1 a right-of-way to comply with Federal, State or local  
2 electric system reliability and fire safety standards,  
3 including standards established by the North Amer-  
4 ican Electric Reliability Corporation; or

5 “(2) the Secretary or the Secretary of Agri-  
6 culture fails to allow the owner or operator of the  
7 transmission or distribution facility to perform ap-  
8 propriate vegetation management activities in re-  
9 sponse to an identified hazard tree as defined under  
10 subsection (b)(6), or a tree in imminent danger of  
11 contacting the owner’s or operator’s transmission or  
12 distribution facility.

13 “(g) TRAINING AND GUIDANCE.—In consultation  
14 with the electric utility industry, the Secretary and the  
15 Secretary of Agriculture are encouraged to develop a pro-  
16 gram to train personnel of the Department of the Interior  
17 and the Forest Service involved in vegetation management  
18 decisions relating to transmission and distribution facili-  
19 ties to ensure that such personnel—

20 “(1) understand electric system reliability and  
21 fire safety requirements, including reliability stand-  
22 ards established by the North American Electric Re-  
23 liability Corporation;

24 “(2) assist owners and operators of trans-  
25 mission and distribution facilities to comply with ap-

1 plicable electric reliability and fire safety require-  
2 ments; and

3 “(3) encourage and assist willing owners and  
4 operators of transmission and distribution facilities  
5 to incorporate on a voluntary basis vegetation man-  
6 agement practices to enhance habitats and forage  
7 for pollinators and for other wildlife so long as the  
8 practices are compatible with the integrated vegeta-  
9 tion management practices necessary for reliability  
10 and safety.

11 “(h) IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary of the Inte-  
12 rior and the Secretary of Agriculture shall—

13 “(1) not later than one year after the date of  
14 the enactment of this section, prescribe regulations,  
15 or amend existing regulations, to implement this sec-  
16 tion; and

17 “(2) not later than two years after the date of  
18 the enactment of this section, finalize regulations, or  
19 amend existing regulations, to implement this sec-  
20 tion.

21 “(i) EXISTING VEGETATION MANAGEMENT, FACIL-  
22 ITY INSPECTION AND OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE  
23 PLANS.—Nothing in this section requires an owner or op-  
24 erator to develop and submit a vegetation management,  
25 facility inspection, and operation and maintenance plan if

1 one has already been approved by the Secretary or Sec-  
2 retary of Agriculture before the date of the enactment of  
3 this section.”.

4 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections  
5 for the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976  
6 (43 U.S.C. 1761 et seq.), is amended by inserting after  
7 the item relating to section 511 the following new item:

“Sec. 512. Vegetation management, facility inspection, and operation, and  
maintenance relating to electric transmission and distribution  
facility rights-of-way.”.

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