

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 35

INTRODUCED BY J. HINKLE, B. LER, C. COCHRAN, S. GIST, C. HINKLE, G. OBLANDER

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA URGING THE IMMEDIATE MODIFICATION OF INEFFECTIVE AND DANGEROUS FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AND WILDFIRE POLICIES IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE OF MONTANA'S COMMUNITIES.

WHEREAS, over the last 2 decades, the United States Forest Service has increasingly adopted a more relaxed approach to wildfire management suppression, often referred to as a "let it burn" policy, rather than pursuing aggressive initial attacks on wildfires; and

WHEREAS, the contributing factors of drought, extensive tree mortality due to insect infestation, the United States Forest Service's relaxed approach to the suppression of wildfire, and the ineffective federal forest management policies that allow for extensive accumulation of biomass make Montana's forest lands highly susceptible to catastrophic and environmentally destructive wildfires that put Montana's air quality at hazardous levels and its communities in imminent danger; and

WHEREAS, wildfire in areas labeled as full suppression areas have had delayed initial attack from days to weeks. A loophole has been exploited through which, by letting a wildfire burn forest land, the United States Forest Service can avoid going through the process of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental assessments required for controlled burns. Using wildfire as a loophole has created a reverse in fire suppression tactics whereby control lines meant to stop fire are intentionally placed miles from the fire boundary, and the fire is used to burn hundreds or thousands of additional acres of forest land. Using and encouraging wildfire as a means to document "treated" forest land is deceptive at best and allows less pressure on the United States Forest Service to actively manage forest land through timber harvest; and

WHEREAS, a lack of positive forest management by the United States Forest Service by reduced timber harvest and relaxed fire suppression has led to extremely large fires that account for large releases of carbon into the atmosphere and hazardous air quality in western states that directly impact the health of citizens. Despite this, wildfire smoke is not counted in the federal Environmental Protection Agency's air quality

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1 standards attainment determinations, yet it is ~~among~~ the largest ~~sources-source~~ of air pollution in Montana
2 communities; and

3 WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service's movement to reclaim and close Forest Service roads
4 and render them undrivable not only reduces access to forest land, which makes fire suppression more
5 unattainable, but also supports the movement or sentiment to reduce timber harvest on forest lands and leads
6 to a lack of forest management; and

7 WHEREAS, the monetary costs to our taxpayers and the federal government for wildfire suppression
8 are astronomical and add to the skyrocketing national debt; and

9 WHEREAS, without aggressive initial attacks on wildfires on federal land, the threat to private land,
10 state land, the wildland-urban interface, and the public health, safety, and welfare will only increase. In addition,
11 Montana's fire suppression costs will substantially increase, and damage to property and natural resources will
12 continue to grow.

13
14 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF
15 THE STATE OF MONTANA:

16 That the 69th Legislature of the State of Montana urges the President of the United States, the
17 Secretary of Agriculture, the Chief of the United States Forest Service, and the United States Congress to
18 immediately modify federal land management and wildfire policies to ensure that:

19 (1) there is aggressive initial attack of wildfires on all federal lands, especially if there is potential
20 for the fire to expand onto private or state land, affect the wildland-urban interface, or cause hazardous air
21 quality;

22 (2) forest roads remain open and drivable, not only for public access but for future forest
23 management activities and effective fire suppression activities;

24 (3) EPA air-quality standards be modified to include wildfire smoke, to the extent that there will be
25 an increase in concern among federal land management and fire suppression agencies that wildfire smoke is
26 unhealthy and harmful to our populace and is a major contributor of carbon released into the atmosphere;

27 (4) all "let it burn" policies are identified and reversed to ensure an aggressive initial attack by the
28 United States Forest Service and that all NEPA processes are followed, preserving thousands of acres of prime

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1 timber and preventing the release of carbon into the atmosphere, which causes unhealthy air quality and
2 excessive spending for added suppression costs; and
3 (5) state and local governments may actively engage in land and wildfire management operations
4 on federal land to protect the public health, safety, and welfare and that stakeholder groups have more
5 involvement in fire management for the creation of policies with the intention to better protect the resources and
6 property most at risk by wildfire.

7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send a copy of this resolution to the
8 President of the United States, the Chief of the United States Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, the
9 Secretary of the Interior, each member of the Montana Congressional Delegation, all ~~50-100~~ United States
10 Senators, the United States Speaker of the House, the Majority Leader and Minority Leader of the United
11 States House of Representatives, and the governors of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada,
12 Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

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