

The Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020

What the bill would do: Protect communities by reducing wildfire risk in federal forests, getting the private sector more involved in addressing dead and dying trees, improving best practices for addressing wildfire, and creating more resilient communities and energy grids.

1. Reducing wildfire risk in federal forests

- The bill would authorize the Forest Service to undertake three priority wildfire mitigation projects that would be limited to 75,000 acres in size, and the federal government would be authorized to carry out expedited activities to protect lives and property from wildfires, such as the installation of fuel breaks, clearing dead and dying trees, and controlled burning.
- The bill includes a technical fix to ensure that the Forest Service consults with the Fish and Wildlife Service when new public peer-reviewed research demonstrates potential harm to threatened or endangered species.
- The bill would allow for expedited environmental reviews regarding the installation of fuel breaks near existing roads, trails, transmission lines and pipelines.
- The bill would codify an existing administrative practice that allows the Forest Service to expedite hazardous fuel removal projects in emergency situations where it is immediately necessary to protect life, property, or natural and cultural resources.

2. Getting the private sector more involved in addressing dead and dying trees

- The bill would establish a new \$100 million biomass infrastructure program. This would provide grant funding to build biomass facilities near forests that are at risk of wildfire and to offset the cost of transporting dead and dying trees out of high-hazard fire zones.
- The bill would lift the current export ban on unprocessed timber from federal lands in the west for trees that are dead, dying, or if there is no demand in the United States.

3. Improving best practices for addressing wildfire

- The bill would expedite permitting for the installation of wildfire detection equipment (such as sensors, cameras, and other relevant equipment) and expand the use of satellite data to assist wildfire response.
- The bill would allow FEMA hazard mitigation funding to be used for the installation of fire-resistant wires and infrastructure and for the undergrounding of wires.
- Given the generational shortage of workers in the forest management field, the bill would authorize a new workforce development program to assist in developing a career training pipeline for forestry workers.
- The bill would establish a new Prescribed Fire Center to coordinate research and training of foresters and forest managers in the latest methods and innovations in prescribed fire practices to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic fires and improve the health of forests.

4. Creating more resilient communities and energy grids

- The bill would expand the Energy Department's weatherization program to allow for the retrofit of homes to make them more resilient to wildfire through the use of fire-resistant building materials and other methods.
- The bill would establish a new \$100 million grant program to assist critical facilities like hospitals and police stations become more energy efficient and better adapted to function during power shutoffs. The new program would also provide funding for the expanded use of distributed energy systems, including microgrids.