



Legislation Text

File #: 20-1197, **Version:** 1

Supervisor Veerkamp and Supervisor Parlin recommending the Board authorize the Chair to sign a letter to United States Senator Dianne Feinstein, with a copy sent to Congressman Tom McClintock, in support of the Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020 (S. 4431), that was introduced by Senator Feinstein (California) and Senator Steve Daines (Montana).

FUNDING: N/A

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

The Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act is a bipartisan bill co-authored by Senator Feinstein and Senator Daines to help communities prepare for and respond to wildfires. The following is a summary of the four primary initiatives of the bill.

1) Reducing wildfire risks 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) Biomass Facilities

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 through early detection systems

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) Create 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.

ALTERNATIVES

The Board could choose not to sign the letter of support.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION

N/A

OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

N/A

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact to the County to support this legislation.

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

Obtain the signature of the Board Chair and forward a copy of the signed letter addressed to Senator Feinstein, Congressman Tom McClintock, as well as a copy of the letter to the County's federal lobbyist, David Turch & Associates.

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT

Public Safety and Economic Development

CONTACT

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