

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON WILDFIRE ISSUES

2017 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Lee B. Perry

Senate Sponsor: Evan J. Vickers

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This concurrent resolution urges Utah's congressional delegation to develop and support legislation to improve the federal wildfire funding process and management of the nation's forests.

Highlighted Provisions:

This resolution:

- expresses concern regarding the current federal funding process for wildfire issues and forest management; and
- urges support for federal legislation that would improve the federal wildfire funding process and management of the nation's forests.

Special Clauses:

None

Be it resolved by the Legislature of the state of Utah, the Governor concurring therein:

WHEREAS, today's fire seasons are, on average, 78 days longer than they were in the 1970s, and are projected to become hotter, more unpredictable, and more expensive;

WHEREAS, over the last few decades, the portion of the United States Forest Service's budget dedicated to fire has increased from under 20% to more than 50% of the United States Forest Service's total budget;

WHEREAS, as wildfire management consumes a significantly larger share of the United States Forest Service's budget, critical funding that supports federal, state, and private forests is reduced;

WHEREAS, compounding the issue is a practice known as "fire borrowing," which occurs when the United States Forest Service takes money from nonwildfire programs to pay for the current year's fire suppression needs that exceed appropriated funding;

WHEREAS, fire borrowing has resulted in the cancellation of forest thinning activities, firefighter training, purchases of firefighting equipment, and recreation projects;

WHEREAS, in order to cover wildfire suppression costs in recent years, the United States Forest Service has been forced to dismiss employees early, cancel contracts, and halt plans to fill critical positions that conserve and protect our nation's public and private forests;

WHEREAS, if the nation does not have healthy and resilient forests, public benefits such as clean air and water, wildlife habitat, places to recreate, and jobs are all at risk; and

WHEREAS, federal legislation is needed to enable more active forest management on all lands, both public and private, through budget process changes and federal forest reforms, including:

- a prohibition on late-season fire borrowing;
- increased funding for nonwildfire suppression programs; and
- significantly increased active, federal forest management, including rewarding collaboration, streamlining the National Environmental Policy Act process and expanding the use of categorical exclusions, and reforestation:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislature of the state of Utah, the Governor concurring therein, urges Utah's congressional delegation to develop and support federal legislation to improve the federal wildfire funding process and management of the nation's forests.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to Utah's congressional delegation, the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior, the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Chief of the United States Forest Service.