



H.R. 5541 – FEDERAL LAND ASSISTANCE, MANAGEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT ACT

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 5541 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Nick Rahall (D-WV) on March 6, 2008. The bill was ordered to be reported, as amended, by voice of the House Committee on Natural Resources on April 17, 2008.

H.R. 5541 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on July 9, 2008.

SUMMARY

FLAME Fund: The bill establishes the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Fund which shall be made available to pay for the cost of catastrophic emergency wildland fire suppression activities, in addition to other funds appropriated for the predicted annual wildland fire suppression activities. The bill authorizes such sums as necessary for fiscal year 2009. The FLAME Fund will be made available to the appropriate Secretary only after a declaration has been issued based on the criteria that the fire covers 300 or more acres, the severity of the fire, and the threat posed by the fire on people, property, or critical resources.

Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: H.R. 5541 requires the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a cohesive wildland fire management strategy to Congress. The strategy is required to include numerous fire management elements, including a system for ensuring that the highest priority fuels reduction projects are being funded first and a system for identifying the most cost effective means for allocating fire management budget resources. The bill specifically requires the Forest Service to notify owners of adjacent private land in writing prior to the date that a prescribed fire is used on a National Forest System.

Wildfire Cost Containment: The bill requires the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct an independent review of each wildfire incident that caused by their respective agencies to incur expenses of more than \$10 million and report their findings to Congress.

Fire-Ready Communities: H.R. 5541 requires the Secretaries to develop regional maps of communities most at risk for wildfires and in need of hazardous fuel treatment and maintenance. The Secretaries are then authorized to provide cost-share grants to communities located in the priority areas for education programs about wildland fire protection practices, firefighter training programs, equipment acquisition, and implementation of a community wildfire protection plan.

BACKGROUND

Wildfires are an important, and usually natural, ecological process which is vital for the productivity of ecosystems in North America. However, the incidence of wildfires has increased in recent years, and due to population and infrastructure growth in the West, the effect of the fires on humans is becoming more severe. Moreover, the costs associated with fighting wildfires near population centers and infrastructure is higher than in unpopulated regions. For these reasons, the overall cost of fire suppression has risen dramatically and created certain budgetary challenges for the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service, which have primary Federal responsibility for fire suppression.

Another factor concerning wildfires on public lands is the accumulation of fuel loads (undergrowth, etc.) in forests. During the Committee on Natural Resources' hearings and markup of this legislation,



Republican Members stressed the importance of effective forest management, especially including fuel-reduction efforts.

The National Interagency Fire Center based in Boise, Idaho, coordinates Federal fire suppression efforts and draws on the resources of several agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the National Weather Service.

[The National Interagency Fire Center](#)

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that enacting H.R. 5541 would “cost \$100 million over the 2009-2013 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts.”

[Full CBO Cost Estimate](#)

STAFF CONTACT

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