

S.2404 – Western Wildfire Support Act

Senator Catherine Cortez Masto

Section 1. Short Title – Western Wildfire Support Act

Section 2. Definitions.

Title I – Preparation

Sec. 101. Firefighting Accounts.

This section establishes accounts within the U.S. Treasury for both the Interior and Agriculture Departments to utilize funds for ground-based and aircraft-related firefighting operations.

This section authorizes \$4,000,000,000 for ground-based operations for fiscal year 2022 and every year thereafter to the accounts. It also authorizes \$500,000,000 for aircraft use for fiscal year 2022 and every year thereafter. These funds can be used to acquire, by contract or purchase, and use aircraft, including unmanned aerial systems, for operations relating to wildland fires.

Sec. 102. Reimbursements for wildfires caused by military training.

Directs the Secretary of Defense to reimburse relevant states or federal agencies for the reasonable costs incurred for services provided in connection with the loss or destruction of property or the mitigation of damage, loss, or destruction of property, and all fire suppression costs as a result of a fire caused by military training or other actions by Defense Department personnel.

Sec. 103. Strategic wildland fire management planning.

Directs DOI and USDA to establish a spatial fire management plan for each unit of Federal land with more than 10 acres of burnable vegetation to include a landscape-scale risk assessment including risks to firefighters, communities, and resources. Such plans shall also address pre-fire planning provisions, a plan for post-fire activities, and plans for wildfire response management. In particular, planning for post-fire activities shall specifically address emergency stabilization and erosion, and seek to prevent the proliferation of invasive species.

The purpose of this section is to provide additional tools toward investing in wildfire prediction and response capacity, emergency stabilization, and combatting the spread of invasive species, in particular.

Sec. 104. Accounts to assist communities in planning and preparing for wildfires.

This section establishes accounts in the U.S. Treasury for “Community-Supported Land-Use Planning Assistance for both DOI and USDA for the purpose of providing at-risk communities with federal funds to establish community wildfire protection plans, address local hazard reductions, assist homeowners in the disposal of brush and slash generated by hazard reduction activities. Such accounts are authorized at \$200,000,000 annually.

This section will help support communities, homeowners, and building owners in adapting homes and property in preparation for wildfire and to reduce its impact.

Sec. 105. Community support during disaster response.

Directs DOI and USDA to establish a program to train and certify local citizens who wish to volunteer to assist federal response efforts during wildfire incidents.

The purpose of this section is to increase local involvement and response efforts in active wildfire events, and to utilize the expertise and familiarity by residents with local landscapes.

Title II – Wildfire Detection and Suppression Support

Sec. 201. Wildfire detection equipment.

Directs DOI and USDA to expedite the placement of wildfire detection equipment, such as sensors, cameras, and other relevant equipment, in areas at risk of wildfire. This section also directs DOI and USDA to expand the use of satellite data to assist wildfire response and expedite permitting required for the installation and maintenance of wildfire detection equipment.

Sec. 202. Grants program for slip-on tank units.

Directs DOI and USDA to establish a program to award states or local governments with grants to acquire slip-on tank and pump units to support fire suppression efforts.

Slip-on tank units can provide forestry departments, local fire departments, contractors, and others with greater flexibility in supporting surge capacity needs. These units can be tailored to fit pickup trucks or flat-bed trailers to provide additional suppression support.

Sec. 203. Assistance to States for operation of air-tankers.

Allows DOI and USDA to provide funding to States for up to 50 single-engine air tankers.

Sec. 204. Research and Development of Unmanned Aircraft System Fire Applications.

Directs DOI, through the Joint Fire Science Program, to research and develop the use of FAA-approved unmanned aircraft systems for wildfire response activities.

Sec. 205. Study on the effects of drone incursions on wildfire suppression.

Directs DOI, in consultation with USFS, to conduct a study on the effects of unsanctioned drone incursions on wildfire suppression efforts, and the effect each occurrence had on length of time required to achieve suppression, impacts to aerial firefighting response, and additional costs expended due to drone incursion.

The ultimate purpose of this study is to prevent future interference of wildfire fighting efforts by state, local, and federal agencies. Although laws already exist to prohibit these incursions, unauthorized private drones have intermittently entered restricted airspace within a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). For safety purposes, an incursion into a TFR causes all aerial firefighting tools to ground, resulting in valuable time and money being wasted. According to

FAA data, private drone intrusions have rapidly increased, exceeding 100 cases a year of unauthorized drones flying near wildfires.

Sec. 206. Study on wildfire detection equipment and integration of artificial intelligence technologies.

Directs the creation of a study on the effectiveness and limitations on the deployment and application of different wildfire detection equipment technologies, taking into account detection ability, location, predictability of wildfire spread, surface rehabilitation, and other factors.

The study shall also review how each technology can provide the most effective and efficient means of dealing with wildfires, and how the integration of artificial intelligence applications can enhance the value of each type of wildfire detection equipment technology by individually and collectively.

Title III – Post-Fire Recovery Support

Sec. 301. Funding for online guides for post-fire assistance.

Authorizes FEMA to enter into agreements with states to operate an online resource to provide information relating to post-fire recovery funding opportunities and other available resources eligible to communities and individuals impacted by wildfire. This online resource shall include a guide that lists and explains the costs and benefits of alternatives available to mitigate the effects of wildfire and prepare to also prepare for potential flooding.

Sec. 302. Long-Term Burned Area Recovery account.

Establishes an account in the U.S. Treasury of up to \$100,000,000 for the USDA per year to conduct long-term rehabilitation projects. Such projects would take place 1-3 years following a contained wildfire with priority given to projects supporting downstream effects on water resources and public safety.

Creation of this account would serve as a counterpart to an already existing DOI account and would supplement existing accounts serving immediate post-fire needs.

Sec. 303. Prize for wildfire-related invasive species reduction.

This section establishes a new “Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize” at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service authorized for a five year period to combat the spread of wildfire-related invasive species, and thus to preserve the pre-fire natural landscape. This prize competition shall be administered by the National Invasive Species Council and receive consultation from a “Wildfire-Related Invasive Species Technology Advisory Board.”

The purpose of the prize is to foster innovative approaches to combat the proliferation of invasive species in post-burn areas and to provide a report detailing the successes and knowledge learned on how better to address this problem in areas of need.