

Section-by-Section - Western Wildfire Support Act – S. 1764

Section 1. Short title; table of contents.

Provides the short title of the bill the “Western Wildfire Support Act of 2024” and the table of contents.

Section 2. Definitions.

Provides key definitions of the Act.

TITLE I—PEPARATION

Section 101. Firefighting account transparency.

This section directs the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture (the Secretaries), in consultation with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, to prepare an annual report on the amounts obligated and used for the Wildland Fire Management appropriations account, including the emergency suppression account. The section also describes the term “Catastrophic Wildfire” and requires the Secretaries to analyze certain components of catastrophic wildfire in the required annual report.

Section 102. Reimbursement for wildfires caused by military training.

This section directs the Secretary of Defense to enter into reciprocal agreements with State agencies for mutual aid in furnishing fire suppression services. The agreements are also required to provide reimbursement to the State agency for fires caused by military training or other actions by the Department of Defense in support of military operations. Any existing agreement will be considered an agreement according to this section if it otherwise meets the requirements of this section.

Section 103. Strategic wildland fire management planning.

No later than September 30, 2026, the Secretary concerned shall review existing spatial fire management policies (commonly referred to as “Potential Operational Delineations” or PODs) for each fireshed on Federal land and issue, as appropriate, new or revised policies that incorporate the best available science and planning tools. The section also sets out requirements to update the policies regularly. The policies must identify potential wildfire and smoke risks; be consistent with resource management plans; delineate potential wildfire control locations and specify places of high wildfire risk; include descriptions of weather conditions that comprise severe fire weather conditions; and include other prefire planning provisions at the discretion of the Secretary concerned. Lastly, the section requires that the Secretary include an employee involved in the development of the fire management policy for a fireshed when developing or revising resource management plans (forest plans) containing that fireshed.

Section 104. Study on integrating local firefighters into wildfire response.

This section requires, not later than 1 year after enactment, the Administrator of the U.S.

Fire Administration, in coordination with the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, to conduct a study on the gaps in training for structural firefighters in high wildfire risk areas and submit a report of the results of the study to the appropriate congressional committees. The study must include a summary of the existing coordination practices between Federal wildland firefighters and State, local, or Tribal firefighters; an analysis of the differences in their response practices when responding to a fire incident that threatens a single structure compared to a community; existing training modules for those response practices; and an estimated cost and spending plan to address any gaps in those training modules.

TITLE II—WILDFIRE DETECTION AND SUPPRESSION SUPPORT

Section 201. Wildfire detection equipment.

This section requires the Secretary concerned, to the maximum extent practicable, to expedite the placement of wildfire detection equipment; expand the use of satellite data to improve detection and response; expedite required permitting for the installation, maintenance, or removal of the detection equipment; used unmanned aerial vehicles to assess fires in incipient stages to determine response actions; review required permitting and procurement requirements for detection equipment in context of new technology; and annually provide a forum for companies engaging in the development and testing of emerging technology to engage with wildland fire managers.

Section 202. Slip-on tank units.

This section expands eligibility for financial assistance for the acquisition of firefighting slip-on tanker units under Sec. 40803(c)(5) of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to also include Indian Tribes. The section also requires the Secretary of the Interior to submit an annual report to the appropriate congressional committees on the implementation of the financial assistance program for slip-on tanker units.

Lastly, the section directs the Secretaries, in coordination with recipients of financial assistance for slip-on tanker units, to promulgate guidance for the mobilization of slip-on tanker units for wildfire response; incorporate mobilized slip-on tanker units into resource tracking systems; and collaborate with the Administrator of the U.S. Fire Administration for training necessary to operate slip-on tanker units.

Section 203. Research and development of unmanned aircraft system fire applications.

This section directs the Secretaries, acting through the Joint Fire Science Program, to work with universities and other research institutions to carry out research and development on the wildfire response applications of unmanned aircraft systems. The section also authorizes the Secretaries to coordinate with the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to test an unmanned aircraft system at FAA test ranges.

Section 204. Study on drone incursions on wildfire suppression.

This section directs the Administrator of the FAA, in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior and the Chief of the Forest Service to conduct a study on the effects of drone

incursions on wildfire suppression activities over the last five years. The study conducted. The study must also evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of certain actions to prevent drone incursions. No later than 18 months after enactment, the Administrator shall submit to Congress a report describing the findings of the study and any related recommendations.

Section 205. Study on modernizing wildfire response technologies.

This section directs the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to conduct a study on necessary improvements to radio communications systems and infrastructure used for wildland fire or prescribed fire operations; real-time situational awareness tools for operational firefighters; and wildland fire predictive modeling.

TITLE III—POST-FIRE RECOVERY SUPPORT

Section 301. Funding for online guides for post-disaster assistance.

This section amends Sec. 201(a) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to include post-disaster assistance among the list of services that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) may support under Federal and State disaster preparedness programs. It also authorizes the Administrator of FEMA to enter into cooperative agreements to provide funding or technical assistance to a State agency to establish, update or operate a website to provide post-disaster recovery funding and resources to a community or an individual impacted by a disaster or emergency. States that receive funding under this section agency must update the website at least every 180 days.

Section 302. Post-fire management and recovery.

This section codifies the Burned Area Emergency Response Teams (BAER Team) to coordinate immediate post-wildfire emergency stabilization and erosion planning efforts in accordance with certain requirements. The BAER team must coordinate and respond to needs no later than 1 year after wildfire containment.

Section 303. Long-Term Burned Area Recovery Account.

This section establishes a new Burned Area Rehabilitation account for the Forest Service, and authorizes appropriations for fiscal year 2025 of up to \$100 million. This account would be used for medium and long-term wildfire rehabilitation efforts for the National Forest System and adjacent lands, including revegetation, watershed restoration, and repair of critical infrastructure.

The section also authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to enter into agreements with non-Federal entities to carry out the authorized rehabilitation projects under a non-Federal cost share of not more than 20 percent, which may include in-kind contributions. Finally, beginning fiscal year 2027 and each thereafter, the Secretary of Agriculture must submit a report on the burned area rehabilitation work performed under this section and other applicable laws.

Section 304. Prize for wildfire-related invasive species reduction.

This section amends section 7001(d) of the Dingell Act to authorize the Secretary to

establish the Theodore Roosevelt Genius Prize for the management of wildfire-related invasive species in order to encourage technological innovation with the potential to advance the mission of the National Invasive Species Council and to award 1 or more prizes annually for a technological advancement related to wildfire-associated invasive species. It also establishes the Management of Wildfire-Related Invasive Species Technology Advisory Board to be composed of 9 members appointed by the Secretary to provide necessary expertise in certain sectors that will consult with certain Federal and non-Federal stakeholders for the prize competition. The authority of the competition is subject to terminate on December 31, 2028.