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Bill That Tries to Address Wildfires in West Has Bipartisan Support

A bipartisan group of senators is supporting a bill designed to reduce wildfire risks and increase firefighting cooperation across state lines in the U.S. Western region.

The Fix Our Forests Act is backed by senators from Utah, California, Montana and Colorado. Environmental groups worry the bill would increase logging projects and deliver a hit to conservation efforts.

The bill was introduced last week by Senator John Curtis, R-Utah, John Hickenlooper, D-Colorado, Tim Sheehy R-Montana, and Alex Padilla D-California. A House version of the bill passed in January.

This bill establishes requirements for managing forests on federal land, including requirements concerning reducing wildfire threats, expediting the review of some forest management projects and implementing forest management projects.

The bill designates certain firesheds at high risk for wildfires as fireshed management areas and directs the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey to jointly establish an interagency Fireshed Center responsible for assessing and predicting fire.

The bill also expedites the review of certain forest management projects under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and exempts certain activities from NEPA review. It also establishes intra-agency strike teams to accelerate the review and any interagency consultation processes under NEPA, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Additionally, the bill limits consultation requirements concerning threatened and endangered species under the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the Federal Land Management and Policy Act of 1976. Finally, it limits litigation involving fireshed management projects and limits legal remedies.

“I don’t think anything could completely prevent wildfires, but through this work, if we can prevent just one more community from experiencing the heartbreak felt by the families in Santa Rosa or in Paradise or the Pacific Palisades and Altadena, then this effort would’ve been worth it,” Padilla [told the L.A. Times](#) in an article last week.

Environment America has argued that instead of promoting science-based policies and forest management practices, the act “bypasses critical environmental laws that protect our ecosystems and restricts scientific input and public engagement. The bill could have devastating consequences for the environment and endangered species.”

The group laid out [a list of reasons](#) why it opposes the bill.

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