
Introduced by Senator Hollingsworth

February 18, 2010

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 75—Relative to wildfires.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 75, as introduced, Hollingsworth. Wildfires: United States Forest Service.

This measure would declare that there is an ongoing emergency due to the threat of wildfire, call on the federal government to take immediate measures to prevent imminent catastrophic wildfires, and request Governor Schwarzenegger to advocate at the federal level for the United States Forest Service to undertake prevention and maintenance work in the state's federal forest lands and to encourage a change in management structure in the United States Forest Service to coordinate decisionmaking authority over state project decisions inside the state.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, Catastrophic wildfires continue to threaten lives,
- 2 property, and the natural resources of the state; and
- 3 WHEREAS, Insurance losses for each fire season run into the
- 4 billions of dollars, and insurers have paid out in excess of eight
- 5 billion dollars (\$8,000,000,000) to thousands of policy holders
- 6 from just the top 10 state wildfires since 1970; and
- 7 WHEREAS, State wildfires cause employment losses in the
- 8 hundreds of millions of dollars; and
- 9 WHEREAS, The increase of catastrophic wildfires in the state
- 10 has resulted in harmful secondary environmental effects, including
- 11 diminished air and water quality, impacted watersheds, increased

1 greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutant emissions, and
2 threatened habitats of sensitive wildlife species; and

3 WHEREAS, Approximately 80 percent of the state's developed
4 surface water supply originates on watershed lands within rural
5 counties and near federal lands. The state's residents utilize this
6 water for domestic, commercial, agricultural, industrial,
7 recreational, and other beneficial uses. These rivers, lakes, and
8 watershed lands also serve as habitat for hundreds of species of
9 fish and wildlife; and

10 WHEREAS, The state is comprised of approximately 50 percent
11 publicly owned land and 50 percent privately owned land, but
12 many rural counties have substantially higher percentages of
13 publicly owned land, some as much as 98 percent; and

14 WHEREAS, There are over 43,000,000 acres of federal land in
15 the state, much of which has not been adequately managed to
16 mitigate the risk of catastrophic wildfire; and

17 WHEREAS, Two of the three largest wildfires in the state in
18 the past 100 years began on federally owned land; and

19 WHEREAS, Millions of dollars are spent each year fighting
20 fires in our national forests; and

21 WHEREAS, The United States Forest Service spent over one
22 billion two hundred seventy million dollars (\$1,270,000,000) on
23 fire suppression in 2008, which exceeded 50 percent of the 2008
24 wildland fire budget; and

25 WHEREAS, The escalating costs of fighting fires on United
26 States Forest Service land over the last 10 years has significantly
27 diminished the available resources for the critically needed
28 prevention measures that could minimize these catastrophic fires;
29 and

30 WHEREAS, The state has made significant strides towards
31 reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires on state and private
32 lands, including ranking lands as to the level of fire hazard,
33 requiring 100 feet of defensible space around homes, requiring
34 ignition-resistant materials on all new construction that is built in
35 a fire hazard severity zone within a state responsibility area, a local
36 agency very high fire hazard severity zone, or a designated
37 wildland-urban interface (WUI) fire area, and many other things
38 to not only address preservation of life and property but mitigate
39 the environmental damage of large scale wildfire as well; and

1 WHEREAS, Even with these positive mitigation efforts made
2 by the state, there continues to be an extreme risk of catastrophic
3 wildfires in the state and throughout the West due to unnaturally
4 heavy fuel loads and the early drying of wildland vegetation; now,
5 therefore, be it

6 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*
7 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature of the State of California
8 declares that there is an ongoing emergency due to the threat of
9 wildfire; and be it further

10 *Resolved*, That the Legislature calls on the federal government
11 to take immediate measures to prevent imminent catastrophic
12 wildfires; and be it further

13 *Resolved*, That the Legislature, together with the state's local
14 governments, requests that Governor Schwarzenegger advocate
15 at the federal level for the United States Forest Service to undertake
16 prevention and maintenance work in the state's federal forest lands,
17 and to encourage a change in management structure in the United
18 States Forest Service to coordinate decisionmaking authority over
19 state project decisions inside the state; and be it further

20 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
21 this resolution to the Governor and to the author for appropriate
22 distribution.