



NEWS

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IAWF Endorses Wildland Fire Legislation

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The International Association of Wildland Fire recently surveyed its members and Board of Directors for their opinions about wildland fire legislation currently pending before the U.S. Congress. The majority of both the members responding to the survey and the Board support all three pieces of legislation.

SUMMARIES OF THE BILLS:

S. 1770. Stable Fire Funding Act of 2007. Establishes in the Treasury separate funds to be used to pay 80% of the cost for Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service emergency wildland fire suppression activities that exceed amounts annually appropriated for wildland fire suppression activities.

S. 1635. A bill to provide for the reimbursement of wildland firefighters for the cost of professional liability insurance. Amends the Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Act, 1997 to provide for the reimbursement of temporary fire line supervisors (employees of the Department of the Interior or the Forest Service whose duties include temporary supervision to manage a wildland or managed fire) for the cost of professional liability insurance.

S. 1152. Wildland Fire Safety and Transparency Act of 2007. Directs the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Directors of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service (NPS), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Chief of the Forest Service, (the Secretaries) to jointly submit annual reports to Congress on the wildland firefighter safety practices of the Secretaries, including training programs and activities for wildland fire suppression, prescribed burning, and wildland fire use.

A SAMPLE OF THE COMMENTS BY THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

S-1770

- The IAWF ought to push for amending this bill to include the BIA, USFWS and NPS in addition to the BLM and USFS and then support the bill and this amendment.
- Likely to be just another smoke and mirrors budgeting/accounting thing. Where is the money going to come from for the 80% stand alone fund? Who manages it? How are the funds doled out?
- Yes, I am in favor. By identifying emergency funding for wildland fires may alleviate the pressure to "borrow" from other programs. Every year has been and will continue to be major fire years as long as the western United States has drought conditions with excessive fuel build-up. The only thing the fire programs have experiences are budget cuts so having emergency funding designated for wildland fires would be helpful.
- S. 1770 does what should have been done years ago- establish a trust fund for firefighting. Wildland firefighting issues will not go away anytime soon, it's about time that Congress funds wildland firefighting accordingly. Next they need to establish a Fuels Management Trust Fund.
- I do not support this bill, how about better funding for fuels management activities with accountability requirements for the Secretary, Chief, Regional Foresters and Forest Supervisors. Implement the Cohesive Strategy with a focus on measurable results on the ground. Providing a set amount of dollars enables old behaviors (like creating a checking account for crack heads). Focus on fixing the problem (fuels management) and not continuing down the same unsuccessful path (full suppression).

S-1635

- It is already in the system for the agency to pay up to 50% of the cost of professional insurance. The wording needs to be changed to allow any and all who supervise the opportunity to be paid back for the cost of the insurance.
- After the court case of 30-Mile, a large number of Type 3 Incident Commanders and other fire managers elected not to continue in fire suppression activities for fear of liability. Paying for insurance may bring some of those folks back.
- S. 1635 helps alleviate the concerns of field-level fire managers that if they are personally sued for accidents that happen in the course of duty, they will have access to legal representation. The IAWF did a great service informing the wildland fire community about this issue last winter.
- Everyone of my frontline supervisors (Crew bosses, etc.) are in strong support of this one.
- I would not need liability insurance if it were not for Marie Cantwell. Also why would I want the agency that failed to support me have a share in paying for my insurance? I pay for my own liability insurance as I am a professional and believe in what I am doing. I would not suggest such a foolish course of action to new federal wildland firefighters, I suggest they go to work for states or local governments where rank and file employees are protected by a Union.

S-1152

- A bill to generate more paper work? Don't we already accomplish this? What is the expected result?

- This is something that should have already been done and I am surprised it has not.
- I favor the report to congress but I feel it should include the state foresters and the state and private lands they are responsible for protecting.
- S-1152 is needed to enhance the safety of firefighters. Nothing focuses political/bureaucratic thinking better than a required report to Congress by the Secretary.
- This is useless, to require another data base, and more reports will do nothing to improve the safety on the fire line. We need to grow leaders, implement new guidance from the Pulaski conference, and reduce the number of rules that must be followed on the line.
- The IAWF ought to support this bill in the strongest possible terms.

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