

National Prescribed Fire Act of 2020

Over the last two decades, the West has experienced growing wildfire risks, with longer fire seasons and bigger and hotter fires. These blistering and massive infernos are devastating homes, businesses, livelihoods, and the economic vitality of Western communities. Scientists and environmentalists agree that pre-fire season controlled burns are an essential strategy for reducing hazardous fuels to mitigate the worst effects of wildfire.

In 2018, the Forest Service determined that 234 million acres of forest are at a high risk of dangerous wildfires. Yet, controlled burns treated only 3 million acres annually during the last decade. Federal land managers should be equipped to get ahead of the problem, especially as the climate crisis worsens. Unfortunately, because vegetation grows continuously, the Forest Service will never be able to address the current hazardous fuels backlog at its current pace. Moreover, controlled burns, on average, emit one-fifth of the smoke of wildfires.

Congress must make a serious investment in hazardous fuels management by increasing the pace and scale of controlled burns, creating a technically skilled preseason controlled burn workforce, and streamlining smoke regulations in winter months to reduce catastrophic fires and smoke in the summer.

The National Prescribed Fire Act of 2020:

- Establishes \$300 million accounts for both the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior (DOI) to plan, prepare, and conduct controlled burns on federal, state, and private lands.
- Requires the Forest Service and DOI to increase the number of acres treated with controlled burns.
- Establishes a \$10 million collaborative program, based on the successful Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, to implement controlled burns on county, state and private land at high risk of burning in a wildfire.
- Establishes an incentive program to provide funding to state, county, and federal agencies for any large-scale controlled burn.
- Establishes a workforce development program at the Forest Service and DOI to develop, train, and hire prescribed fire practitioners, and establishes employment programs for Tribes, veterans, women, and those formerly incarcerated.
- Requires state air quality agencies to use current laws and regulations to allow larger controlled burns, and give states more flexibility in winter months to conduct controlled burns that reduce catastrophic smoke events in the summer.