

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 2001-4664, by Representatives Sump and Doumit

WHEREAS, The most extensive and serious problem related to the health of national forests in the interior west is the overaccumulation of vegetation, which has caused an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrollable, and catastrophically destructive wildfires; and

WHEREAS, Without increased restoration treatments, wildfire suppression costs, natural resource losses, private property losses, and environmental damage are certain to escalate as fuels continue to accumulate and more acres become high risk; and

WHEREAS, At a low intensity, fire is ecologically beneficial and has positive effects on biodiversity, soil productivity, and water quality; and

WHEREAS, Millions of acres of national forest are at significant risk of catastrophic wildfire, and millions more acres will be at similar risk due to increases in the mortality of trees and brush caused by insects and disease; and

WHEREAS, Catastrophic wildfires not only cause damage to the forests and other lands, but also place the lives of fire fighters at risk and pose threats to human health, personal property, sustainable ecosystems, and air and water quality; and

WHEREAS, High-risk forest fuel has accumulated in combination with reduced fire response capability by federal agencies during the 1990s, resulting in catastrophic wildfires becoming more difficult and expensive to extinguish with a disproportionate burden being placed on state and local resources, while the costs to fight these fires increased by one hundred fifty percent between 1986 and 1994, and the costs of maintaining a readiness force increased by seventy percent between 1992 and 1997; and

WHEREAS, In Washington state from 1990 to 1998, the state spent seventy-two million dollars to fight forest fires that destroyed nearly one hundred eighty-four thousand acres;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives support a cohesive intergovernmental strategy at all levels for the purpose of protecting the integrity and posterity of our forests and wildlands, wildlife habitat, watershed, air quality, human health and safety, and private property and to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place these resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives support the use of an appropriate mix of fire suppression activities and forest management methodologies, including selective thinning, selective harvesting, grazing, the removal of excessive ground fuels, and small-scale prescribed burns, including increased private, local, and state contracts for prefire-treatments on public forest lands and more effective fire suppression in public forest lands through increased funding of mutual aid agreements with professional state and local public fire fighting agencies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives support a national prescribed fire strategy for public lands that promotes forest protection and rural community safety, creates a process for evaluation of worst case scenarios for risk of escape,

identifies alternatives that will achieve the land management objectives while minimizing the risk and use of prescribed fire, and is incorporated into regulatory land use planning programs that propose the use of prescribed fire as a management practice.

--- END ---