

## 1 HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 22

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4 A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF  
5 MONTANA URGING THE REDUCTION OF AN OVERABUNDANCE OF FOREST FUELS.

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7 WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service was first organized to protect the national forests from  
8 fire and to provide a sustainable supply of timber, water, goods, and services for the people of the United  
9 States; and10 WHEREAS, citizens of Montana and communities throughout the western United States still depend  
11 on the prudent stewardship, the sustained utilization of resources, and the steady production of goods and  
12 services from the multiple use management of public lands in those western states; and13 WHEREAS, the April 1999 U.S. General Accounting Office report, "Western National Forests, a  
14 Cohesive Strategy is Needed to Address Catastrophic Wildfire Threats" states, "the most extensive and  
15 serious problem related to the health of national forests in the interior West is the overaccumulation of  
16 vegetation, which has caused an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrollable, and catastrophically  
17 destructive wildfires"; and18 WHEREAS, the April 2000 U.S. Forest Service report, "Protecting People and Sustaining Resources  
19 in Fire-Adapted Ecosystems: A Cohesive Strategy" in response to the General Accounting Office report,  
20 confirmed the conclusion stated above and further warns "Without increased restoration treatments in  
21 these ecosystems wildland fire suppression costs, natural resource losses, private property losses, and  
22 environmental damage are certain to escalate as fuels continue to accumulate and more acres become  
23 high-risk.", and the report also specifies that, at a low intensity, fire is ecologically beneficial and has  
24 positive effects on biodiversity, soil productivity, and water quality; and25 WHEREAS, the U.S. Forest Service further acknowledges that 39 million acres of national forest  
26 are at significant risk of catastrophic wildfire and an additional 26 million acres will be at similar risk due  
27 to increases in the mortality of trees and brush caused by insects and disease; and28 WHEREAS, catastrophic wildfires, such as those in California in 1993, Florida in 1998, and  
29 Montana and Idaho in 2000, are recognized as among the defining natural disasters of the past decade;  
30 and

1 WHEREAS, the conflagrations that engulfed hundreds of thousands of acres in Montana during  
2 2000 caused millions of dollars of damage to the property of residents; and

3 WHEREAS, catastrophic wildfires not only cause damage to the forests and other lands, but place  
4 the lives of firefighters at risk and pose threats to human health, personal property, sustainable  
5 ecosystems, air quality, and water quality; and

6 WHEREAS, the escaped Cerro Grande Prescribed Fire in May, 2000, which consumed 48,000  
7 acres and destroyed 400 homes with losses exceeding \$1 billion in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the  
8 escaped Lowden Prescribed Fire in 1999 that destroyed 23 homes in Lewiston, California, highlight the  
9 unacceptable risks of using prescribed burning if prescribed burning, as reported, was the sole forest  
10 management practice of the subject federal land management agencies; and

11 WHEREAS, high-risk forest fuel has accumulated in combination with reduced fire response  
12 capability by federal agencies during the 1990s, resulting in catastrophic wildfires becoming more difficult  
13 and expensive to extinguish with a disproportionate burden being placed on state and local resources, the  
14 costs to fight these fires has increased by 150% between 1986 and 1994, and the costs of maintaining  
15 a readiness force has increased by 70% between 1992 and 1997; and

16 WHEREAS, current planning efforts of the U.S. Forest Service, such as the Sierra Nevada  
17 Framework, the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, the Roadless Initiative, and the  
18 federal monument proclamations rely primarily on the extensive use of prescribed fire, which will further  
19 exacerbate the risk of catastrophic wildfires on federal lands throughout the West.

20

21 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
22 STATE OF MONTANA:

23 (1) That in the interest of protecting the integrity and posterity of Montana's forests, wild lands,  
24 wildlife habitat, watersheds, air quality, human health and safety, and private property, the U.S. Forest  
25 Service and other federal land management agencies are urged to immediately implement a cohesive  
26 strategy to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place these resources at high risk of catastrophic  
27 wildfire.

28 (2) That the agencies are urged to utilize an appropriate mix of fire suppression activities and  
29 forest management methodologies, including selective thinning, selective harvesting, grazing, the removal  
30 of excessive ground fuels, small-scale prescribed burns, and the increased use of private, local, and state

1 contracts for prefire treatments on federal forest lands.

2 (3) That the Legislature urges that more effective fire suppression in federal forest lands be  
3 pursued through increased funding of mutual aid agreements with state and local public firefighting  
4 agencies.

5 (4) That in the interest of forest protection and rural community safety, the federal Department  
6 of Agriculture and the Department of Interior are urged to immediately draft, for public review and  
7 adoption, a national prescribed fire strategy for public lands that creates a process for the evaluation of  
8 worst case scenarios that present a risk of escaped prescribed fires and identifies alternatives that will  
9 achieve the land management objectives while minimizing the risk and use of prescribed fire, and that this  
10 strategy be incorporated into any regulatory land use planning program that proposes the use of prescribed  
11 fire as a management practice.

12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send copies of this resolution to President  
13 George W. Bush, Vice President Richard Cheney, Department of Interior Secretary Gale Norton,  
14 Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, the Governors of Montana, Idaho, Washington,  
15 Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, South Dakota, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico,  
16 Montana's Congressional Delegation, the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, the Director of the U.S. Park  
17 Service, and the Director of the Bureau of Land Management.

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