

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 7
INTRODUCED BY R. LAIBLE

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL FOREST COUNTY PARTNERSHIP RESTORATION PROGRAM ESTABLISHED BY THE 106TH CONGRESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN NATIONAL FORESTS IN MONTANA AND OTHER WESTERN STATES.

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes the existence of a present and continuing threat to the lives and property of citizens of the western states of the United States and to the watersheds and multiple values contained in the forest lands of the country caused by the extreme risk of catastrophic wildfires; and

WHEREAS, it is critical to recognize that forests are dynamic in nature; that they exhibit a variety of growth characteristics depending on species and ecological setting; that wildfire is a natural component of the evolutionary history of most western forests; that all the values of the forest, not only the human components, are important; that the health of the forest determines its susceptibility to fire and other destructive agents such as insects and disease; that continuing increments of forest growth over removals will add to excessive fuel loading and increase the fire risk; that all woody material regardless of age or size contributes to potential fires; that removal of excess wood by using best forest management practices and prescribed fire decreases the probability of destructive wildfires; and that the value of excess woody material removed should help offset the expense of treatment; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, the United States Congress, with guidance from the Western Governors' Association, enacted the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (Public Law 106-291), which calls for progressive new local government and federal agency forest restoration partnership programs to reduce fire risk and restore watershed health, especially in western conifer forests; and

WHEREAS, the developing proposal for a National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program includes national forests in Montana and other western states and is designed to fully implement the direction from Congress and the Western Governors' Association; and

WHEREAS, county-led restoration programs on western public lands have focused generally on small demonstration projects to restore terrestrial wildlife habitats, protect and improve aquatic and riparian areas, restore watershed health, and reduce fire risk; and

WHEREAS, elevating the county efforts to the landscape level of western national forests would

represent a powerful strategy to respond to existing critical restoration needs; and

WHEREAS, the National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program is the first effort to create a fully operational model of a county government and federal land manager partnership on a multiple national forest scale; and

WHEREAS, the program is specifically designed to accomplish the following:

- (1) expand the operating scale of local government and federal land management restoration partnerships to a multistate, multiagency land base;
- (2) utilize best science and a collaborative process to evaluate and restore high-risk areas of western forests within a 10-year period;
- (3) address land management planning problems of multiagency ownerships at landscape levels;
- (4) improve local leadership and collaborative processes addressing federal land management programs;
- (5) enhance coordination between local, federal, and tribal program jurisdictions and processes;
- (6) reduce conflicts in treatment of biophysical and socioeconomic resources and address multiagency issues in planning and management, especially regarding the treatment of certain species;
- (7) reduce the current lengthy periods needed for review, approval, and implementation activities;
- (8) improve treatment of economic and social infrastructure issues related to both traditional and new industry as well as local custom and culture;
- (9) consider treatment of fuel regardless of size or age;
- (10) use a systematic, diagnostic approach to evaluate forest health problems;
- (11) apply appropriate silvicultural methods that replicate natural forest succession;
- (12) account for the cost of maintaining forest health using long-term risk analysis;
- (13) consider forest products and materials to offset costs for forest health measures through development of private market end users for forest products and materials; and
- (14) improve information technology for managing resources and informing the public; and

WHEREAS, the National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program for western forests is proposed for the period 2003 through 2014 and with appropriate federal funding, it is anticipated that the forest acreage most at risk to fire and forest health can be restored through this period.

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

That the Legislature recognizes the critical roles that county governments play as partners to protect the health, welfare, and safety of their citizens and related public resources and, therefore, fully supports the National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program and the restoration and preservation of national forests in Montana and other western states.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution be sent to the Governor of Montana, the Western Governors' Association, the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Chief of the United States Forest Service, and the Montana Congressional Delegation.

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