

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 5

INTRODUCED BY S. MALEK

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A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA RECOGNIZING THE 2017 FIRE SEASON THAT CAUSED LOSS OF LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS ACROSS THE STATE.

WHEREAS, 2,422 fires destroyed 1,366,498 acres of land and 141 structures across Montana in 2017 and cost roughly \$400 million in fire suppression costs; and

WHEREAS, 19-year-old Trenton Johnson of Missoula lost his life fighting the Florence Fire near Seeley Lake on July 19, 2017; and

WHEREAS, 29-year-old Brent Witham of Mentone, California, died while fighting the Lolo Peak Fire south of Missoula on August 2, 2017; and

WHEREAS, the Lodgepole Complex Fire burned 270,723 acres in eastern Montana and destroyed grazing land ranchers relied on to sustain livestock, creating hardships such as reduced livestock numbers, increased veterinary bills due to respiratory damage, burns, and infections, diminished revenue due to low calf weights from a lack of available feed, an increased risk of losing developed genetics when livestock had to be sold to pay for losses, and the destruction of over 1,400 miles of fencing and other infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, the Rice Ridge Fire, which was at one time identified as the nation's top wildfire priority due to its extreme speed and voracity, burned 155,900 acres, threatening the town of Seeley Lake and over 1,000 homes in Powell and Missoula counties, prompting the mandatory evacuation of 580 homes, closing Seeley Lake schools, and creating possibly the worst wildfire smoke event in the United States in both duration and intensity that threatened the lives and health of citizens, livestock, and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, the Lolo Peak Fire burned 53,902 acres, killed one firefighter and injured two others, destroyed two homes, caused the evacuation of 3,000 people and 1,150 residences around Lolo, and cost \$48 million in fire suppression, making it the most expensive single fire of 2017; and

WHEREAS, the Canyon Creek Fire in the Scapegoat Wilderness destroyed 6 cabins, 100 cattle, 40,000 acres of pasture, 200 miles of fence, and 1,500 tons of hay before stopping 5 miles short of Augusta; and

WHEREAS, the Sapphire Complex-Little Hogback Fire burned in remote areas of the Lolo National Forest and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, destroying 43,733 acres of primarily timbered land, threatening 35

1 residences, and killing countless wildlife; and

2 WHEREAS, the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research confirmed Montana tourism was adversely
3 affected, estimating the state saw a decline of roughly 800,000 visitors in the third quarter of 2017, which resulted
4 in an estimated loss of \$240.5 million in visitor spending; and

5 WHEREAS, large wildfire activity has increased markedly since the mid-1980s, displaying higher
6 frequency, longer durations, and longer overall fire seasons that correlate with steadily increasing global
7 temperatures, earlier spring thaws, and longer periods of drought; and

8 WHEREAS, the 2017 fires caused upheaval in many citizens' lives across the state, forcing them to watch
9 in fear as their livelihoods and homes were threatened, suffering health complications due to poor air quality, and
10 facing the extreme financial and emotional burden of rebuilding homes, ranches, livestock herds, and businesses;
11 and

12 WHEREAS, the citizens of Montana continue to face threats of fire in the future as conditions are
13 expected to increase unless action is taken to curb the elements that lead to the causes of large wildfires.

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

17 That the Montana Legislature recognizes the 2017 fire season as one of the most devastating in our
18 history and recognizes the losses of human and animal lives and livelihoods across the state.

19 - END -