



Breaking News: Wildland Firefighter Safety Act Passes Senate!

As a section of the Omnibus Public Lands Bill (S.22), the Wildland Firefighter Safety Act was passed in the Senate by a whopping 73 to 21 vote!



The Wildland Fire Safety and Transparency Act (H.R. 4832 and S. 1152) was originally introduced in the 110th Congress, and easily passed through committees in both the House and Senate. However, Senator Coburn filibustered the Bill (along with nearly 160 other conservation-related bills) and kept it from coming to a final vote in the previous Senate. The Senate will now hand the Bill it passed over to the House where it has been promised by House leaders to get a speedy vote and likely passage.

The Wildland Firefighter Safety Act requires the Secretaries of both Agriculture and Interior to give an annual report to Congress about their agencies' wildland firefighter safety programs and practices. This **provides an incentive for each agency to continually improve their safety practices**. The Act also **requires that private contract firefighters maintain the same safety training certifications and qualifications as federal firefighters**. This is necessary given the increasing role that contract firefighters are performing in wildland fire management, and past scandals over fraudulent training certifications for contract firefighters.

Back in 2007, FUSEE worked with Senator Maria Cantwell's office to help rewrite sections of the Wildland Firefighter Safety Act in order to include firefighter training programs needed to enhance safety in prescribed burning and wildland fire use along with wildfire suppression. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that WFU has been specifically mentioned in legislative language! In addition to reviewing drafts and supplying Bill language, FUSEE solicited co-sponsors in both houses of Congress, and worked hard to get the Bill passed through all relevant Congressional committees. Joining FUSEE in support of the legislation were fraternal firefighter organizations such as the International Association of Wildland Fire (IAW) and the Federal Wildland Fire Service Association (FWFSA).

In addition to helping Senator Cantwell write portions of the Bill, FUSEE members were able to get Senator Ken Salazar to co-sponsor the Bill in the Senate. Now that Salazar has become the Secretary of Interior, we can be assured that when the Bill is signed into law by President Obama, the Bill's provisions will be taken seriously by all Department of Interior agencies.

FUSEE is especially excited about the Bill because it includes wildland fire use and prescribed burning activities along with wildfire suppression. Prescribed burning and wildland fire use are generally far safer than emergency wildfire suppression, but they are not without risk, too. When firefighters are better trained in managing fire use (as opposed to simply "fighting" fires), this will reduce their safety risks while improving their ability to use fire to reduce fuels, restore ecosystems, and protect communities.

FUSEE offers fire management workers from federal agencies a safe, legal, confidential means of educating policymakers in Congress and the Administration through our collective voice. FUSEE looks forward to seeing the Bill quickly passing the House and sitting soon on President Obama's desk to sign!

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