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AJR-18 Federal Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. (2015-2016)

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Assembly Joint Resolution No. 18

CHAPTER 137

Relative to the federal Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.

[Filed with Secretary of State August 25, 2015.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 18, Patterson. Federal Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.

This measure would urge the Congress of the United States to support H.R. 167, the federal Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, in order to provide a long-term, stable source of funding for federal agencies to conduct the necessary fuels management on national forest lands, while retaining resources to suppress catastrophic wildfires.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, According to the United States Forest Service, approximately 58 million acres of national forest lands, or one-third of the entire National Forest System, are in need of restoration due to the high risk for catastrophic wildfire; and

WHEREAS, California is home to 21 national forests; and

WHEREAS, Over the last three decades, fire season lengths have increased by 60 to 80 days, and annual acreages burned have more than doubled to over seven million acres; and

WHEREAS, The United States Forest Service plans to thin less than 3 percent of its high-risk acreage in the next federal fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, One percent of the wildfires fought on national forest lands each year consume up to 30 percent of the annual fire budget, and the wildland fire management appropriation has tripled its portion of the United States Forest Service budget from 17 percent to 51 percent from 1995 to 2014, inclusive; and

WHEREAS, Over seven of the last 12 years, the United States Forest Service and the United States Department of the Interior have had to divert over \$2 billion in funds from other forestry and land management programs to fund firefighting efforts; and

WHEREAS, This "fire borrowing" has had adverse effects on other United States Forest Service projects, with funds being transferred from other programs that provide necessary hazardous fuel reduction and vegetation management on national forest lands; and

WHEREAS, This "fire borrowing," in 2012, consisted of \$440 million being transferred to the fire suppression account and projects at all levels, including multiple fuel reduction projects on national forest lands in California, being cancelled or deferred; and

WHEREAS, It has been shown that post-wildfire rehabilitation costs can exceed the costs of wildfire suppression by two to 30 times; and

WHEREAS, Frequent, severe wildfires result in great environmental damage, and the prevention of wildfires is necessary to decrease the great risk posed to California due to drought, climate change, and the large amount of overgrown national forest lands in the state; and

WHEREAS, The Governors of California, Washington, and Oregon requested the 113th Congress to support common sense wildfire funding, as embodied in the federal Wildfire Disaster Funding Acts of 2014, H.R. 3992 and S. 1875, but these pieces of legislation were not signed into law; and

WHEREAS, Catastrophic wildfires are an ongoing yet preventable threat to California and its residents, and the inability of federal agencies to manage national forest lands appropriately due to funding constraints is a pressing issue that must be addressed as quickly as possible; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature of the State of California respectfully urges the 114th Congress of the United States to support H.R. 167, the federal Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, in order to provide a long-term, stable source of funding for federal agencies to conduct the necessary fuels management on national forest lands, while retaining resources to suppress truly catastrophic wildfires; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the Majority Leader of the Senate, and to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States.