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ACR-271 2008 fire season. (2017-2018)

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Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 271

CHAPTER 210

Relative to the 2008 fire season.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 07, 2018.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 271, Acosta. 2008 fire season.

This measure would commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the 2008 fire season and the 13 firefighters who lost their lives.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, The 2008 California wildfire season was one of the most devastating since the turn of the 21st century with 1,593,690 acres of land burned throughout the year; and

WHEREAS, For the first time since 1977, the Armed Forces assisted with ground-based firefighting, when former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger dispatched 400 California National Guard troops, including Chief Medical Officer Susan Pangelinan, to manage fire lines; and

WHEREAS, Governor Schwarzenegger said, "Something is happening, clearly. There's more need for resources than ever before ... it's fire season all year round"; and

WHEREAS, The fires broke out after three years of below-normal rainfall dehydrated much of California's forests and woodlands, making them prone to wildfires. For California, the spring of 2008 was the driest on record for many locations; for example, San Francisco registered only 0.67 inches of rain out of a normal of 5.18 inches from March to May; and

WHEREAS, The spring of 2008 not only broke the record for the fewest inches of rainfall in Sacramento, at 0.17 inches, it represented less than one-third of the previous record low of 0.55 inches of rainfall in 1934; and

WHEREAS, As vegetation turned into dry tinder in early June, Governor Schwarzenegger declared a statewide drought for the first time in 17 years. Dry thunderstorms and lightning, rarely seen on the California coastline in June, rolled onshore on the weekend of June 20 and 21, unleashing 25,000 to 26,000 dry lightning strikes across northern and central California, igniting more than 2,000 fires that became known as the 2008 June Fire Siege; and

WHEREAS, Through the summer months, over 350 structures were destroyed and hundreds of millions of dollars of property and natural resources were damaged, thousands of people were evacuated, and communications, power delivery, and transportation systems were disrupted; and

WHEREAS, The firefighting effort was also large and intensive. Strong cooperation and coordination among federal, state, and local firefighting agencies was essential. At the peak of fire control operations on July 13, over 20,000 firefighters were engaged. Both Governor Schwarzenegger and former President George W. Bush toured fire operations. Governor Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency for 13 counties, and President Bush declared a state of disaster, which made available a wide variety of federal assets; and

WHEREAS, The month of November also, uncharacteristically, saw over 2,000 fires, which began burning across southern California on November 13; and

WHEREAS, Governor Schwarzenegger described the conditions contributing to the fires as a “perfect storm,” including strong Santa Ana and sundowner winds, with gusts reaching 80 miles per hour, as well as high temperatures, low humidity, and dry conditions; and

WHEREAS, The most significant November fires were the Montecito Tea Fire, the Sayre Fire, and the Freeway Complex Fire; and

WHEREAS, The Montecito Tea Fire started on November 13 in the community of Montecito and resulted in the destruction of 210 homes; and

WHEREAS, The Sayre Fire started on November 13 in the Sylmar neighborhood of the City of Los Angeles and resulted in the destruction of at least 630 structures, including 500 mobile homes, 9 single-family homes, and 11 commercial buildings. The loss of more than 500 residences is the worst loss of homes due to fire ever in the City of Los Angeles, exceeding the loss of 484 residences in the 1961 Bel Air Fire; and

WHEREAS, The Freeway Complex Fire started on November 15 and spread across the communities of Corona, Chino Hills, Yorba Linda, Anaheim Hills, and Brea in the Counties of Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside and also spread to Diamond Bar in the County of Los Angeles, burned about 30,305 acres, injured 14 firefighters, destroyed about 200 structures, and forced the evacuations of about 7,000 homes; and

WHEREAS, Over the 2008 fire season, 13 firefighters perished while battling the state's wildfires, which took the lives of 32 people; and

WHEREAS, While the fires had a great impact on the people within these communities, the extraordinary efforts of thousands of dedicated firefighters prevented even greater impacts; and

WHEREAS, The efforts of California firefighters and those from around the country that responded to these fires resulted in less area burned, a reduced threat to communities, public health, and safety, and reduced direct fire impacts to ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, We are forever indebted to all the firefighters who put their lives on the line and made the ultimate sacrifice to keep California safe during one of the worst fire seasons in our state's history; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature commemorates the 10-year anniversary of the 2008 fire season and the 13 firefighters who lost their lives; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.