

than the distinguished former gentleman from this body, the Honorable William C. Cramer.

Mr. PUTNAM. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), who has taken up the mantle of leadership from Mr. CRAMER as the lead advocate for Florida's infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge adoption of this measure.

I yield back the balance of my time. The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. PUTNAM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5145.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES IMPLEMENT WESTERN GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION "COLLABORATIVE 10-YEAR STRATEGY FOR REDUCING WILDLAND FIRE RISKS TO COMMUNITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT"

Mr. POMBO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 352) expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully implement the Western Governors Association "Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment" to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, and prepare a National Prescribed Fire Strategy that minimizes risks of escape, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES 352

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That it is the sense of Congress that—

(1) in the interest of protecting the integrity and posterity of United States forests and wildlands, wildlife habitats, watersheds, air quality, human health and safety, and private property, the Forest Service and other Federal land management agencies should—

(A) fully support the "Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment" as prepared by the Western Governors' Association, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, and other stakeholders, to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place these resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire;

(B) use an appropriate mix of fire prevention activities and management practices, including forest restoration, thinning of at-risk forest stands, grazing, selective tree removal, and other measures to control insects and pathogens, removal of excessive ground fuels, and prescribed burns;

(C) increase the role for private, local, and State contracts for fuel reduction treatments on Federal forest lands and adjoining private properties; and

(D) pursue more effective fire suppression on Federal forest lands through increased

funding of mutual aid agreements with professional State and local public fire fighting agencies;

(2) in the interest of forest protection and public safety, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior should immediately prepare for public review a national assessment of prescribed burning practices on public lands to identify alternatives that will achieve land management objectives to minimize risks associated with prescribed fire; and

(3) results from the national assessment of prescribed burning practices on public lands as described in paragraph (2) should be incorporated into any regulatory land use planning programs that propose the use of prescribed fire as a management practice.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO).

Mr. POMBO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, citizens in the West are bracing this year in fear of catastrophic fires. The summer is not even over, and we have seen 3.6 million acres burn on State, Federal, and private lands. These catastrophic fires are so intense the fire literally destroys every sign of life and can rage for thousands of acres.

But this is not a new phenomenon or a 1-year event. During the wildfire season, 81,681 fires burned 3.5 million acres that killed 15 firefighters and threatened rural communities nationwide. Congress must take action. Our current Federal strategy to handle catastrophic wildfire is not adequately addressing a looming crisis. The Federal Government must take action to prevent loss of wildlife habitat and to protect rural communities.

This is why I am here today offering H. Con. Res. 352 before the House of Representatives. This wildfire resolution expresses the sense of the U.S. Congress to fully implement the Western Governors Association collaborative 10-year strategy for reducing wild land fire risk to communities and the environment and to prepare a national prescribed fire strategy to minimize risk of escape.

America needs to know Congress understands the forest health crisis is causing these fires and that Congress is taking action. It is important to keep in mind our forests are in constant transformation. A particular forest now will look much different in 10 years and in about 50 years will not look like the same forest. Sometimes a forest can get overpopulated with trees. Some of these trees become diseased, creating enormous amounts of dry timber fuel to spur a catastrophic fire. Reducing forest density and improving the ability of healthy forests to survive expansive wildfires must become the number one priority of Federal forest managers. It is time for Members of Congress to make the tough decisions necessary to end catastrophic losses of wildlife habitat, for-

est resources, and, most importantly, human lives on all Federal forest lands.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H. Con. Res. 352, a resolution expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully support the collaborative 10-year strategy for reducing wild land fire risk to communities and the environment as prepared by the Western Governors Association, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Interior and other stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, the risk of wild land fires to the 192 million Forest Service acres is higher today than ever before. The potential for loss of life and property is also increased in areas where more people are building homes within the wild land urban interface.

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The local communities situated near our unmanaged national forests experience firsthand the ecosystem problems resulting from fires that cannot be controlled. As we consider H. Con. Res. 352, 29 forest fires are burning in our Western states and six of these fires are out of control. Our efforts to extinguish these fires are stretched to the limit because more than one area in the West is experiencing incidents that have the potential to exhaust all agency fire resources.

I applaud President Bush for providing the necessary emergency funds to fight these fires. However, we must continue to think of long-term solutions with four essential goals in mind: The prevention and suppression of wildfires, the reduction of hazardous fuels, the restoration of fire-adapted ecosystem, and the promotion of community assistance. As we focus on these goals, Mr. Speaker, we must encourage the Federal agencies involved to work with the governors in their efforts to deal with the wildland fire and hazardous fuel situation.

The Western Governors 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan provides Federal land management agencies with a plan to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire. In addition, the plan provides a national assessment of prescribed burning practices to minimize risks of escape.

I urge my colleagues to support passage of H. Con. Res. 352.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. POMBO. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), chairman of the subcommittee.

(Mr. GOODLATTE asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding and I commend him for his leadership in

bringing this important resolution before the House. I strongly support it and was pleased to cooperate in seeing it move through the Committee on Agriculture, and I urge my colleagues to adopt it here.

The gentleman is quite correct. We are not facing an ordinary situation here. These are not natural forest fires, and as a result, this resolution would clearly establish Congress' commitment and support for a proactive forest management strategy.

The strategy cannot simply be to let these fires burn. They consume the entire forest from the ground to the top of the tallest and oldest and most extensive trees. They leave behind bare mineral soil, dead trees and vegetation, hot running streams and rivers, and the threat of more devastation from massive mudslides. The historic efforts of managing fire suppression will only lead to an increase in the forest health crises and the probability of more catastrophic wildfires like the ones we are experiencing today. We must actively manage by focusing on forest health and if we want to protect our firefighters, our communities, or forests, we must work to create healthy, sustainable ecosystems through good stewardship. Healthy forests burn more predictably and can be more easily controlled when necessary.

The Western Governors Association comprehensive strategy does this very thing. It calls for moving quickly to plan programs that will reduce hazardous fuels and implementing restoration efforts on fire-ravaged landscapes.

Therefore, I strongly urge my colleagues to support House Concurrent Resolution 352, to reinforce Congress' commitment to the health of our forests.

Mr. POMBO. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. HERGER).

Mr. HERGER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this resolution. We are in the midst of what could be the most costly and destructive fire season for which records have been kept. More than 3½ million acres have burned so far this year, almost 2½ times the 10-year average, and close to a million acres more than at this time in 2000 which was then the worst fire season in 50 years.

It is an ominous glimpse of what the future holds if Congress and the administration do not make a dramatic commitment and take immediate steps to manage our forests aggressively to protect public health and safety. Our forests are incredibly unhealthy and literally choking from an unnatural accumulation of forest fuels. Some areas are up to 10 times denser than historically. Because of this dangerous build-up of trees, instead of the healthy fires that clean up the forest floor, we are now seeing wildfires of catastrophic size and intensity that cannot be controlled, threatening entire communities, lives and property, and leaving

charred forests that will not recover for a century or more. These fires are not natural. They are not inevitable. They are not environmentally healthy. They are a very serious threat to public health and safety.

According to the Forest Service's own estimates, the number of acres at risk for such catastrophic fire events has grown to alarming proportions. Today close to 80 million acres of our Federal forest lands are threatened and, Mr. Speaker, this devastating fire season is further proof that time is quickly running out.

The 1999 GAO, Government Accounting Office, report that provided the first insight into the extent of our forest health crises also predicted that the window for taking effective action is quickly closing. They indicated that we have only 10 to 25 years within which to take action before these fires become widespread. We are not going to prevent forest fires, but by implementing a fire protection and fuel reduction strategy, setting aggressive goals, and giving land managers the tools and flexibility they need, we can reduce their size and intensity and give our firefighters a fighting chance. Congress approved such a plan in 1998. The Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act, which this House passed by the overwhelming margin of 429 to 1, requires implementation of a locally developed bipartisan pilot project based on a system of environmentally sensitive fuel breaks and thinning that would reduce the risk of fire and protect communities. It would protect wildlife and enhance their habitat. With a \$3 return for every \$1 expended and \$2.1 billion in economic benefit for rural communities, it is proof that there are win-win, cost-effective fire protection solutions out there that are ripe for immediate implementation.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution is a critical step toward giving this emergency and the need for solutions the urgency and the serious attention they deserve. I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this resolution. Fires continue to blaze through the western portion of our country. Aided by drought the damage stretches into a million acres and billions of dollars.

More than 22,000 communities across the country and over 211 million acres of federal lands are currently at risk to these severe wildfires. In Arizona alone, over a half a million acres of land burned with more than 400 homes and other structures. Nearly 33,000 people were evacuated.

The key to reducing risk of these catastrophic wildfires is to actively manage forests not just in the interface but landscape wide to ensure forests can withstand drought, insects and disease. Reaching the appropriate tree density and promoting native mixes of species ensures less severe burns than what we have seen ravage the west already this year.

This is not a commercial logging or timber issue. This is an issue of keeping the forests

healthy and well maintained through thinning, logging and prescribed burns. Policies that slow down this process coupled with appeals that further halt necessary treatments must be stopped. Without these changes, we will see more years similar to this one where the fire year is shaping up as the most devastating on record. Some 2.7 million acres have already burned, nearly three times the average acreage for this time of year.

We still have time. The fire season is in its early stages. Thinning and forest management practices necessary to ensure our forests are able to survive future catastrophic wildfires must begin without further delay.

In a 1999 report, the General Accounting Office report to the U.S. House of Representatives, entitled "Western Forests: A Cohesive Strategy Is Needed To Address Catastrophic Wildfire Threats," was published in 1999. The GAO reported that "the most extensive and serious problem related to the health of national forests in the interior West is the over-accumulation of vegetation, which has caused an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrolled and catastrophically destructive wildfires. According to the U.S. Forest Service, 39 million acres on national forests in the interior West are at high risk of catastrophic wildfire."

The Western Governors Association (WGA) signed it "Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wild Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment" in 2001. The plan emphasizes preventing catastrophic blazes instead of just fighting them.

I encourage Congress to support the plans of the 10-year strategy. I encourage the immediate implementation of practices we know will aid in preventing future fires that burn thousands of acres of land and homes.

Mr. POMBO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 352, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read:

"Concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that Federal land management agencies should fully support the "Collaborative 10-year Strategy for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment" as prepared by the Western Governors' Association, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of the Interior, and other stakeholders, to reduce the overabundance of forest fuels that place national resources at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, and prepare a national assessment of prescribed burning practices to minimize risks of escape."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair