

Wayne Allard

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ALLARD COSPONSORS WILDFIRE BUFFER BILL LEGISLATION CREATES ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEDERAL AGENCIES TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY FORESTS

WASHINGTON DC – U.S. Senator Wayne Allard today announced his co-sponsorship of S. 1315, the Enhanced Safety from Wildfire Act of 2003. Originally introduced by Senator Larry Craig of Idaho, the “Buffer Bill” would amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to make it possible for private land owners to receive compensation for a loss of property as a result of a wildfire spreading from Federal land that has not been managed as Condition Class 1. Similar legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman Mike Simpson, also of Idaho.

“The Hayman Fire, Coal Seam and Missionary Ridge fires, among others, made last year one of the most catastrophic wildfire seasons ever,” said Allard. “Hundreds of homes and structures were destroyed and private citizens suffered tremendous property losses as the fires raged through unhealthy forests. Much of the property damage suffered may have been averted had such legislation been enacted last year.”

“The use of approved forest health management practices to create forest fire buffer zones between forested Federal lands and adjacent non-Federal lands would reduce the occurrence of wildfires on forested Federal lands or, at least, limit their spread to non-Federal lands and the severity of the resulting damage,” continued Allard.

The bill requires Federal Agencies to manage a “buffer zone” on Federal land, greater than 6400 acres, that is adjacent to non-Federal land. When forested Federal lands adjacent to non-Federal lands are not adequately managed with a “buffer zone” and wildfire occurs, the legislation states the owners of the non-Federal lands are eligible for compensation for damages resulting from the spread of wildfire to their lands.

Senator Allard will continue to work in the Senate to enact the Healthy Forest Initiative. While some people remain opposed to forest-wide restoration and would instead limit fuel reduction to the wildland-urban interface or WUI, Allard believes that poor forest health is a problem that extends beyond the WUI. “It is time they realize that the wildland-urban interface is but one component of a complex problem,” said Allard. “We must treat our forests on a landscape basis if we are to prevent catastrophic forest fires, and this includes responsible treatment of areas outside of the wildland-urban interface, such as municipal watersheds and more distant forest areas.”

Allard concluded by adding, “The Buffer Bill will provide an incentive to address many of the urban interface concerns without neglecting overall forest health.”

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Senators Mike Crapo of Idaho, Jim Talent of Missouri, and Gordon Smith of Oregon, join Senator Allard as co-sponsors.

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