

S. 1764, Western Wildfire Support Act - Summary

Senator Catherine Cortez Masto

The *Western Wildfire Support Act* will provide at-risk communities across the western United States with additional resources to help prevent wildfires before they start, combat those that do spark, and help communities touched by wildfire recover and rebuild.

The comprehensive *Western Wildfire Support Act* will allow communities in Nevada and across the western U.S. to acquire the training, equipment, and funding they need to combat the increasing dangers posed by wild and rangeland fires.

Specifically, the *Western Wildfire Support Act* is focused on three key tenets, outlined below:

- **Preparation**
 - Creates greater transparency amongst Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) wildfire management and emergency suppression accounts to better understand how funds and resources are utilized and the circumstances under which they are deployed in order for agencies to enhance future planning and budgets.
 - Directs DOD to enter into reciprocal agreements for mutual aid in furnishing fire suppression services. The agreements are also required to provide reimbursement to the State agency for fires caused by military training or other actions by the Department of Defense in support of military operations.
 - Directs DOI and USDA to update fire management plans for federal land in Nevada and across the U.S. These plans must identify potential wildfire and smoke risks, delineate potential wildfire control locations, and other pre-fire planning and wildfire response management provisions.
 - Requires a study to identify gaps in training for structural firefighters in high wildfire risk areas to ensure coordination and best practices can be applied between Federal firefighters and State, local, and tribal firefighters.
- **Suppression**
 - Directs DOI and USDA to expedite the permitting and placement of wildfire detection equipment – including cameras and heat sensors – in at-risk wildfire areas, and expand the use of satellite data to improve wildfire detection and response.
 - Directs DOI and USDA to provide an annual forum with wildland fire managers to assess the development and testing of emerging technologies to better adapt to changing nature of wildfires and response techniques.
 - Expands eligibility for financial assistance for the acquisition of firefighting slip-on tanker units under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to also include Indian Tribes to help establish fleets of vehicles that can be quickly converted to be operated as fire engines.
 - This language was incorporated from Senator Cortez Masto’s bill, S.3870, the Slip-on Tanks for Tribes Act.
 - Directs DOI and USDA to carry out R&D with universities on the use of FAA-approved drones to fight wildfires.

- Includes a bipartisan [provision](#) to stop observers with unauthorized drones from interfering with fire-fighting efforts.
- Commissions a study to assess deficiencies and improvements needed for –
 - Radio communications systems needed for wildfire response;
 - Interoperability and real-time awareness among all on-ground responders;
 - Wildfire predictive modeling, including use of AI technology.
- **Recovery**
 - Authorizes FEMA to support post-disaster assistance under its Federal and State disaster preparedness programs.
 - Authorizes FEMA to create online resource guides to help communities and individuals impacted by wildfires access available assistance and resources.
 - Codifies the Burned Area Emergency Response Teams (BAER Team) to coordinate immediate post-wildfire emergency stabilization and erosion planning efforts.
 - Authorizes \$100 million in funding to help communities impacted by wildfires conduct long-term rehabilitation projects.
 - Establishes a competition to combat the spread of wildfire-related invasive species and help preserve the pre-fire natural landscape.

This legislation facilitates several wildfire priorities recommended by Nevada wildfire officials and stakeholders, and expands upon authorities created under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (i.e. IIJA), including:

- Additional funding for emergency stabilization projects following wildfire.
- Resources for local (Tribal) authorities to acquire immediate response support.
- Authorities to enhance personnel training and utilizing local expertise.
- Investments in new wildfire detection equipment (cameras, sensors, UAVs, etc.).
- Investments in prediction and preparation capacities.
- Additional programs to develop treatments and strategies to combat invasive species.
- Resources for federal agencies to collaboratively work with local authorities to reduce threats to shared stewardship landscapes.
- Additional support for local managers to prepare for risk and prepare communities for wildfire response and management.