

Wednesday, June 20, 2012

Washington – Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA), Ranking Member on the Natural Resources Committee, Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Ranking Member of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee, and Rep. Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) introduced critical legislation yesterday to combat catastrophic wildfires and protect rural communities. Recent wildfires around the country highlight the need to deal with fire risk, especially on western forests and public lands.

The framework of this legislation builds upon the 2003 Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), which allows for expedited consideration of projects that reduce the risk of wildfire. The Depleting Risk from Insect Infestation, Soil Erosion, and Catastrophic Fire Act (DRISC Act) would encourage the Secretary of Agriculture to work with Governors to identify areas of concern in at least one national forest in each state. Projects in these areas would be evaluated under the accelerated HFRA process. This is similar to a proposal included in the Senate Farm bill.

“The House of Representatives is like Nero, playing the fiddle while Rome is burning. The Republicans are spending an entire week on legislation that has no chance of being enacted into law while firefighters are spending day and night trying to protect people and homes in Colorado and New Mexico,” said Ranking Member Markey (D-MA), Ranking Member on the Natural Resources Committee.

“Arizona has faced a series of devastating fire seasons recently, and we can’t leave the next few years to chance,” Rep. Grijalva said. “We need a comprehensive plan that puts fire suppression at the top of our priority list. Not only do we need to do more to protect lives and property, we need to make sure we don’t do more to harm the environment than help it. This is a good plan that deserves Congressional approval, and I’m going to do all I can to make sure it passes,” said Ranking Member Grijalva (D-AZ), Ranking Member of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee.

“We have seen the damage that catastrophic wildfires have had on New Mexico,” Rep. Luján (D-NM) said. “I have been working closely with impacted communities and tribes to address their needs with regard to fire prevention as well as rehabilitation after last year’s devastating fires. That is why I introduced The Forest Stewardship and Fire Fuels Reduction Act of 2012,

which is a 10-year reauthorization of a federal program that funds efforts to reduce overgrown vegetation in forests that contribute to the intensity and devastation of wildfires. The reauthorization of this critical program is included in the comprehensive DRISC Act, and I look forward to working with Ranking Member Markey and Ranking Member Grijalva to pass this much needed legislation.”

Additionally, the DRISC Act provides additional tools for forest managers by authorizing stewardship contracting and good neighbor authority. Both of these programs have been successful in accelerating thinning and restoration work in Colorado and Utah. Finally, the bill makes a minor amendment to the Emergency Watershed Protection Act to provide for priority consideration of grants to communities impacted by wildfire.

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