

Regional Leadership in Wildland Fire Research Act of 2024

Senator Ben Ray Luján and Senator Dan Sullivan

Background

Wildfires are burning in ways that surprise even seasoned firefighters. Drying vegetation and forests are contributing to increasingly frequent and intense wildland fires, growing costs to support the necessary work of suppressing or eliminating those fires, repairing damage to those areas, and helping communities recover. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, current wildfire models are failing to adequately predict fire behavior under extreme conditions and in more complex environments. These models also struggle to reproduce recent catastrophic wildfires, making them more likely to fail at predicting future wildfires or determining when and where it is safe to conduct prescribed burns.

To support effective wildland fire management and prepare firefighters against evolving risks, next-generation fire and vegetation models are needed. At the same time, research must recognize the differing challenges and risks for wildland fire management at the regional level and ensure new strategies and modeling can be sufficiently tailored. Congress must ensure that the wildland fire management community can pursue a range of approaches that ultimately improves our understanding of wildland fires and our ability to safeguard human lives, communities, and ecosystems.

Summary

The **Regional Leadership in Wildland Fire Research Act** would establish regional research centers at institutions of higher education across the country. Each center will:

- Conduct research to improve our understanding of wildland fire, including causes and associated risks for fires, rehabilitation of affected ecosystems, mitigation strategies that improve firefighter safety, and more;
- Develop, maintain, and operate next-generation fire and vegetation models and technologies to support wildland fire management; and
- Develop a career pathway training program to help carry out wildland fire research.

In addition, this bill would:

- Establish a National Center Coordination Board, led by the Administrator of the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, to coordinate the work of the centers and avoid duplicative activities; and
- Establish Regional Advisory Boards, comprised of regional representatives from wildfire management agencies, state governments, Tribes, and other stakeholders, to provide input on research objectives and assistance disseminating models and findings.

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