

1 **** BILL NO. ****
2 INTRODUCED BY ****
3 BY REQUEST OF THE ****
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5 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION ISSUES,
6 METHODS AND COSTS; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION."
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8 WHEREAS, since the destructive Big Burn of 1910, federal wildfire policy has been to suppress fires at
9 all costs, resulting in forests that are overstocked with fuel;

10 WHEREAS, wildfires consume twice as much land each year on average than in the 1990s, a trend
11 expected to continue;

12 WHEREAS, more than one-third of Montana homes are exposed to moderate to high wildfire risk;

13 WHEREAS, a variety of factors have exacerbated the risks, including regulatory red tape, incomplete
14 government partnerships, unexplored economic benefits, and unrecognized risk-sharing;

15 WHEREAS, environmental reviews, endangered species concerns, and pernicious litigation prevent
16 necessary mechanical treatment and prescribed burns, which could lessen ladder and canopy fuels, reduce
17 fuel loads and improve habitat;

18 WHEREAS, profitable markets for shrubs and small-diameter trees may be developed in engineered-
19 wood plants to produce oriented-strand board, biochar, or wood chips;

20 WHEREAS, use of prescribed fires as a management tool should be encouraged, perhaps as a
21 recognized property right, expanded liability protections, or certified burning;

22 WHEREAS, as the number of homes in moderate- and high-wildfire risk areas has doubled since 1990,
23 volunteer, local, state and federal authorities are faced with protecting these structures;

24 WHEREAS, improved cooperation between states, tribes, and counties can together improve forest
25 health and reduce wildfire risk;

26 WHEREAS, use of all resources should be examined to maximize private, local government, and state
27 fire resources;

28 WHEREAS, the Montana Legislature, which sets policy for and pays for much of the wildland

1 firefighting on behalf of state taxpayers, has not fully examined these and other issues since 2009.

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3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

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5 NEW SECTION. **Section 1. Study of state fire suppression issues, methods and costs.** (1) The
6 environmental quality council, provided for in 5-16-101, shall conduct a comprehensive fire suppression study.

7 (2) The study must include an investigation of:

8 (a) firefighting operations in Montana, including operations on tribal land and private land, by the
9 state and federal governments, and the management policies affecting the success of those operations;

10 (b) the efficient use of fire suppression resources, including equipment and firefighters;

11 (c) impact of operations on private land and the effective use of private resources to fight fires; and

12 (d) state and federal forest management policies and how those policies may contribute to an
13 increased number of wildfires, great safety risk to firefighters, or compromised effectiveness of fire suppression
14 efforts.

15 (3) The environmental quality council shall complete the study by September 15, 2026, and report
16 its findings and recommendations, including legislation, to the 70th legislature.

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18 NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Appropriation.** There is appropriated \$50,000 from the general fund to
19 the legislative services division for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, to pay for costs associated with the
20 study required under [section 1].

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