

“Fit for Purpose” Firefighting Agency Legislation

NOTE: This paper addresses legislation introduced in February 2025, that would create a single Federal wildland firefighting agency within the Department of the Interior, and move the current Forest Service firefighting responsibilities to this new agency.

No hearing or other action has been scheduled on this legislation, and NAFSR is monitoring the situation closely. We are providing this draft statement to make you aware of the issue and concerns we have identified with such a move, but we are not asking you to take any action at this point.

We will keep members informed of any activity related to this bill on our NAFSR website.

Summary:

S. 441, known as the “Fit for Purpose Wildfire Readiness Act of 2025,” aims to consolidate firefighting operations of five Federal land management agencies into a single agency under the Department of the Interior. NAFSR has concerns about this bill, which might inadvertently impede fire suppression efforts and have unintended consequences for land management and firefighting, as well as for firefighter safety.

NAFSR highlights that while consolidating agencies might seem efficient, wildland fire management involves much more than just suppression. The critical linkage with land management, including fuels reduction and prescribed fire, could be compromised. The bill also overlooks the role of thousands of Forest Service employees who assist in firefighting efforts but who are not primarily firefighters, as well as the effectiveness of existing interagency coordination through the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).

While firefighting organization is of course very important, there is an urgent need to address the root causes of wildfires, such as overly dense forests, development in the wildland-urban interface, and changing weather patterns. Reducing the wildfire threat will require more forest thinning, mechanical treatments, and the application of lower intensity fires to build forest resilience. Continuing to emphasize fire suppression efforts without front-end investment in treatments across large, forested landscapes will not address the problem and will contribute to continuing intense wildfires.

Rather than legislate a new firefighting organization, NAFSR supports the “Fix Our Forest Act” (H.R. 471), which focuses on addressing these underlying issues. However, we caution that the creation of a new Wildland Fire Agency could complicate these efforts. We also note a need to address broader, systemic issues with overall wildland fire management (beyond suppression operations) in a holistic manner.