WILDFIRE WEEKLY
addressing wildfire and related risk together

In remembrance of September 11th, the Wildfire Alliance honors the tremendous sacrifice of the first responders who gave their lives that day, as well as all emergency personnel who continue to work tirelessly to protect lives and property in communities everywhere.

Updates from Capitol Hill

Senate Committee Discusses Wildfire-Related Clean Air Act Changes

The Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works today held a brief hearing discussing yet-to-be-released text of the "Wildfire Emissions Protection Act" (WEPA), which will amend the Clean Air Act to simplify the process of state forest and fire agencies conducting prescribed burns.
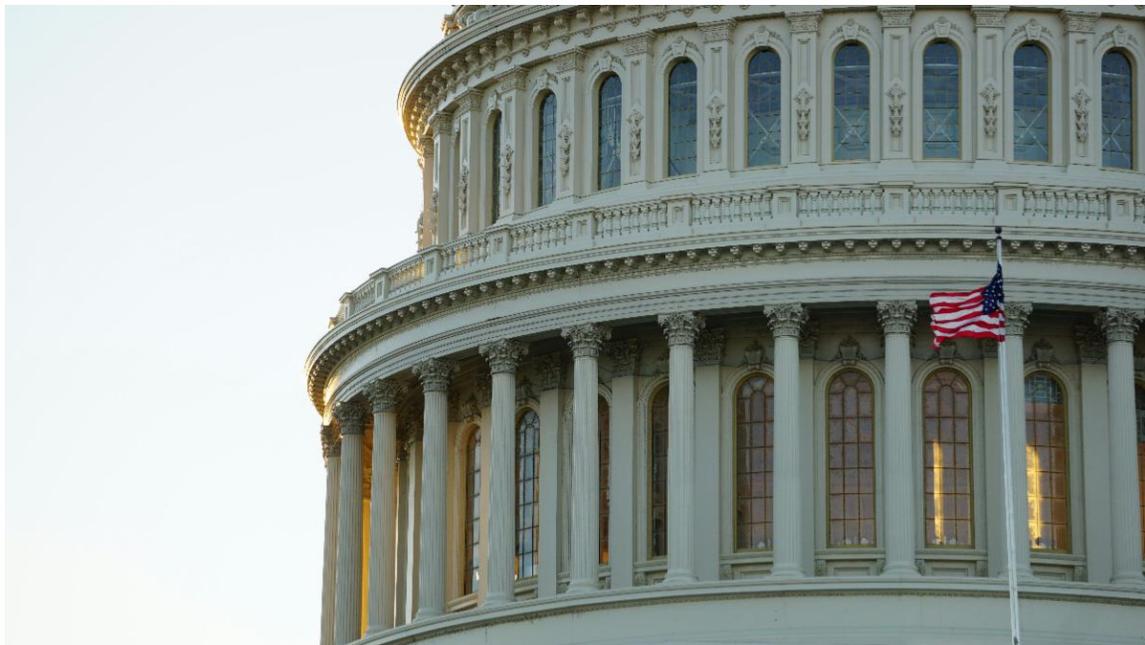
WEPA, which does not yet have listed sponsors or appear on the Committee's website or Congress.gov, targets the "exceptional events" designation in the Clean Air Act, which allows states to request that air quality data during specified periods be **excluded from determining that state's compliance with federal air quality standards**, as long as those periods fall under an "exceptional event" reason.

Members of the Committee and hearing witnesses emphasized that the current administration of the "exceptional event" clause involves a burdensome approval process, requiring states to present significant documentation justifying prescribed burns as exceptional events, and a significant lag time in the Environmental Protection Agency's processing and approval of such designation requests.

Comments from Senators on both sides of the aisle indicated bipartisan support for reforming the Clean Air Act to make the exceptional event exemption process less burdensome on individual states, and to facilitate the use of prescribed burns in forest management. Additionally, witnesses who testified during the hearing noted that prescribed burns incur far lower costs than combatting wildfires and that the timed nature of burns means that they results in less air pollution than wildfire.

Comments by Committee members indicated that the current WEPA draft language would revise the Clean Air Act to allow states broader discretion in designating "exceptional events" periods, and require the EPA to overturn such designations, a change from the existing requirement that the default status of such requests is pending EPA approval. However, Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) raised concerns about whether such flexibility would allow for an excessive number of low-air quality days to be designated as "exceptional events", possibly an allusion to states manipulating air quality compliance by selectively excluding air quality days linked to industrial pollution.

The full hearing can be found **here**. It is unclear when the legislation will be officially introduced. Any updates will be included in future Wildlife Alliance newsletters.

HOT TOPICS

The Aggressive Initial Attack Policy - What To Know

Two weeks ago, we highlighted the Wildfire Alliance's forest management priority, emphasizing that proper forest management involves wildfire fuel

reduction, resulting in fewer and less destructive wildfires. When wildfires start, attention and resources shift to containment and elimination. Minutes matter. A combination of factors, including terrain, available fuel, and wind, can allow wildfires to spread rapidly, quickly consuming large swaths of land and demanding significant resources to contain.

The aggressive initial attack strategy, a policy adopted by **California**, **Colorado**, and other states, has been hailed as a successful approach to stopping wildfires within hours, limiting the damage and cost of such blazes. The strategy emphasizes adopting state-of-the-art detection systems to immediately identify wildfires when they begin, and dispatching significant resources to immediately extinguish the fire. If resources are able to be on-site within an hour or less after a wildfire starts, a combination of firebreaks and significant volumes of water and flame retardant can ensure that the fire is contained or extinguished within the same day. The strategy incurs higher upfront costs than other approaches, as it requires more personnel to be ready around the clock and requires a higher degree of readiness of equipment, including aircraft and fire retardant. However, the higher up-front cost of adopting an aggressive initial attack strategy pays off in reducing the risk and resultant expenses associated with runaway wildfires, and the resources involved are tied up for hours, able to be reassigned immediately, instead of being tied up for days or weeks on a larger fire.

Though aggressive initial attack is not a new policy, it has recently received increased attention. In March, U.S. Senators Tim Sheehy (R-MT) and Andy Kim (D-NJ) introduced legislation seeking to adopt a national aggressive initial attack standard for wildfire suppression, **requiring that an initial attack be conducted within the first 30 minutes of a fire starting**.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Wildland Urban Interface Summit - Prescott, AZ | Oct. 28-30**
- **Southern Blueridge TREX - Blueridge NC & SC | Nov. 3-15**

Wildfire in the News

- **Wildfire Today -** Feds sue California Utility, Claim It Started Deadly Eaton and Fairview Wildfires
- **New York Times -** U.S. Firefighters to Mask Up After Decades-Long Ban on Smoke Protections
- **Associated Press -** After Wildfires, California Schools Are Still Recovering From Closures

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About Us

Wildfire Alliance is a coalition of local governments and state entities working with Congress and federal agencies to address the rising threat of wildfires.

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