



MEGAFIRE ACTION

To: Interested Parties

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Date: June 22nd, 2026.

Subject: The Megafire Crisis is a National Security Threat

Overview

America's wildfire crisis is a growing threat to our nation's security. Catastrophic wildfires increasingly endanger military installations, affect homeland resilience, and place unsustainable demand on key forces, making wildfire risk reduction a national security imperative. And while the connection between domestic wildfire and military affairs is not new,¹ the stakes have grown considerably.² The Fix Our Forests Act (S. 1462) would confront this national security risk through landscape-scale fuels reduction, streamlined project permitting, and technology deployment on federal lands to address the structural conditions driving escalating wildfire risk. **S. 1462 warrants consideration not only as land management legislation, but as a national security investment to confront worsening megafires.**

This memo outlines the following key themes:

1. America's wildfire crisis is a growing national security threat.
2. Wildfires increasingly disrupt military readiness and threaten critical infrastructure.
3. Extended fire seasons strain National Guard and Reserve resources needed for other missions.
4. Investments in wildfire innovation can strengthen both national defense and wildfire resilience.

Wildfires are already a strategic focus of the Department of Defense.

Ongoing wargaming efforts in recent years have modeled the effects of various homeland incidents, including catastrophic wildfires, on military mobilization and domestic political will to intervene in crises abroad.³ Wildfire at home has long been a concern for America's military, with paratroopers in World War II diverted to the West Coast as firefighting auxiliaries in case of intentional blazes set by enemy forces⁴ and the War Advertising Council's creation of the Smokey Bear campaign.⁵

¹ Trego, G. D. (2012). We didn't start the fire...And we won't pay to stop it: Financing wildfire management in America's wildland-urban interface. *William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review*, 36(2), 595–641. <https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1546&context=wmelp>

² Evans, A. (2024, September). Redefining the military's role in wildfire suppression. Progressive Policy Institute. <https://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PPI-Military-Role-in-Wildfires.pdf>

³ RAND Corporation. (2026, May). Preparing the homeland for great-power conflict: West Rook. https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CPA4890-1.html

⁴ Wildfire Today. (2021, February). Triple Nickles: Paratroopers who fought wildfires during World War II. <https://wildfiretoday.com/triple-nickles-paratroopers-who-fought-wildfires-during-world-war-ii/>

⁵ Blakemore, E. (2019, August). How Fear of a WWII Invasion Gave Rise to Smokey Bear. *History*. <https://www.history.com/articles/smokey-bear-wwii-origins>



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Military installations in the U.S. are exposed to substantial wildfire risk.

A substantial and growing share of U.S. military installations and other critical national security infrastructure face high or very high wildfire hazard exposure, placing critical infrastructure, training ranges, and operational continuity at dozens of facilities at direct risk.⁶ Documented wildfire incidents on or adjacent to military installation boundaries have forced training suspensions, diverted base operating budgets to emergency expenditures, and directly degraded force readiness at affected installations.⁷ A 2019 Dept. of Defense analysis found that nearly half (36 of 79) of assessed Air Force, Army, and Navy mission assurance priority installations were vulnerable to wildfire.⁸ In 2024 the 90,000 acre Windy Deuce fire forced the Pantex nuclear weapon assembling and disassembling plant to suspend operations after coming within a few miles of the plant.⁹

Domestic wildfire responses leave units unavailable for missions overseas.

Use of National Guard and Reserve units for wildland firefighting, across both the Army and Air Force, has become a regular occurrence, with wildfire activations over 23 of the last 25 years.¹⁰ Experts point out that these repeated activations leave many units unavailable to contribute to important overseas missions, especially in times of potential crisis.¹¹ As these experts point out, “if the current model of double-tasking military units persists, the country would be unable to mount an adequate response if faced with both a high-intensity conflict and a severe wildfire season.”¹² If the megafire crisis isn’t addressed, these effects on availability and readiness will continue to grow as fire seasons lengthen into fire years.¹³

Dual-use technology stands to benefit both military and civilian readiness.

Defense investments in autonomous aircraft systems, including DARPA's ALIAS program being tested at Texas testbeds and wildfire sensing platforms deployed at installations like Kirtland Air Force Base, demonstrate the dual-use potential of technologies that can simultaneously advance military readiness objectives and materially improve civilian

⁶ Narayanan, A. (2021, September). An enterprise-wide look at Department of the Air Force installation exposure to natural hazards. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA523-1.html; National Conference of State Legislatures. (2025, March). Military installation resilience: Wildfire. <https://www.ncsl.org/military-and-veterans-affairs/military-installation-resilience-wildfire>

⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2014). GAO-14-446 (Report No. GAO-14-446). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-14-446.pdf>

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense. (2019, January). Report on effects of a changing climate to the Department of Defense. <https://media.defense.gov/2019/jan/29/2002084200/-1/-1/1/climate-change-report-2019.pdf>

⁹ Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. (2024, February). Texas wildfires force major nuclear weapons facility to briefly pause operations. <https://thebulletin.org/2024/02/texas-wildfires-force-major-nuclear-weapons-facility-to-briefly-pause-operations/>

¹⁰ National Interagency Fire Center. (n.d.). Military support. <https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/military-support>

¹¹ Ellison, T. (2025, January). Devastating Los Angeles wildfires highlight national security risks too. <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/devastating-los-angeles-wildfires-highlight-national-security-risks-too>

¹² Evans, A. (2024, September). Redefining the military's role in wildfire suppression. Progressive Policy Institute. <https://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/PPI-Military-Role-in-Wildfires.pdf>

¹³ Cattau, M. E., Wessman, C., Mahood, A., & Balch, J. K. (2020). Anthropogenic and lightning-started fires are becoming larger and more frequent over a longer season length in the U.S.A. *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, 29(4), 668–681. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geb.13058>



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wildfire detection and response.¹⁴ Investments in improving wildfire technology can carry direct impacts to national defense missions and Section 303 of FOFA creates a multi-agency public-private wildfire technology testbed program modeled after the Defense Innovation Unit with the goal of advancing key emerging technologies in a competitive pilot program.

Wildfire affects the wellbeing of our vulnerable veterans.

The January 2025 Los Angeles fires required emergency evacuation of homeless veterans and nursing home patients from the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs campus, showing that our nation's most vulnerable veterans shoulder the direct and acute burden of the wildfire crisis, even after their service ends.¹⁵

The Fix Our Forests Act strengthens our national security by confronting the wildfire crisis.

S. 1462 tackles four key challenges: planning, permitting reform, technology adoption for improved decision making, and building community resilience—all essential to scaling up effective wildfire mitigation. S. 1462 will make it easier to plan, permit and implement landscape scale wildfire resilience projects while also preparing for a world with more wildfires. S. 1462 advances work to protect our ecosystems, our communities and our national security.

¹⁴ Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. (2024, November). Texas, DARPA to establish testbed to use autonomy to fight wildfires. <https://www.darpa.mil/news/2025/texas-darpa-alias-testbed>; Roza, D. (n.d.). Kirtland Air Force Base wildfire sensor. *Air & Space Forces Magazine*.

<https://www.airandspaceforces.com/kirtland-air-force-base-wildfire-sensor/>

¹⁵ Military.com. (2025, January 14). Homeless vets and nursing home patients evacuated from West Los Angeles VA to escape wildfires.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/01/14/homeless-vets-and-nursing-home-patients-evacuated-west-los-angeles-va-escape-wildfires.html>