

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 5532

To establish a Wildfire Intelligence Center, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 12, 2024

Mr. PADILLA introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred
to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To establish a Wildfire Intelligence Center, and for other
purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Wildfire Intelligence
5 Collaboration and Coordination Act of 2024”.

6 **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

7 It is the sense of Congress that—

8 (1) wildfire management is a complex, multi-
9 jurisdictional issue that requires an integration of ef-
10 forts at all levels of society, including the Federal

1 Government, State, Tribal, and local governments,
2 and the private sector; and

3 (2) the report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation
4 and Management Commission entitled “On FIRE:
5 The Report of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and
6 Management Commission” and dated September
7 2023 represents a consensus set of recommendations
8 from 50 diverse experts to improve the outcomes
9 from wildfire in the United States, finding that—

10 (A) climate change and rapidly changing
11 ecosystems represent fundamental shifts in con-
12 ditions that existing fire behavior models and
13 existing fire management system are not de-
14 signed to meet;

15 (B) research, applied science programs,
16 data management, and technology procurement
17 and application relating to wildfire are housed
18 within a wide array of Federal entities and aca-
19 demia, leading to a limited ability to set prior-
20 ities and general inefficiencies;

21 (C) various predictive services and deci-
22 sion-support functions exist to aid Federal man-
23 agers and decisionmakers in the wildland fire
24 community that, due to the different missions
25 and jurisdictions of the Federal agencies in-

1 volved and the fact that the services reside in
2 several different Federal agencies, would benefit
3 from improved interoperability and more coordi-
4 nated priority setting and purchasing power;
5 and

6 (D) an interagency joint office should be
7 established—

8 (i) with membership from entities con-
9 ducting research and addressing wildland
10 fire management;

11 (ii) with dedicated and separate fund-
12 ing to fulfill the mission of comprehensive
13 assessment and prediction of fire in the
14 wildland and built environment interface
15 through data aggregation and science-
16 based decision-support services; and

17 (iii) in close collaboration with the ex-
18 isting wildland fire management system in
19 the United States.

20 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

21 In this Act:

22 (1) **BOARD.**—The term “Board” means the
23 Board for the Center appointed under section
24 4(e)(1).

1 (2) CENTER.—The term “Center” means the
2 Wildfire Intelligence Center established by section
3 4(a).

4 **SEC. 4. WILDFIRE INTELLIGENCE CENTER.**

5 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the
6 Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce,
7 and the Department of the Interior a joint office, to be
8 known as the “Wildfire Intelligence Center”, the duties
9 of which are to study, plan, coordinate, and implement
10 issues of joint concern among the Department of Agri-
11 culture, the Department of Commerce, and the Depart-
12 ment of the Interior, including—

13 (1) serving as the development and operational
14 center for the comprehensive assessment and pre-
15 diction of fires that occur in the wildland and fires
16 that move into the built environment to provide deci-
17 sion support services to inform land and fuels man-
18 agement, community outreach and risk reduction,
19 post-wildfire recovery and rehabilitation, and fire
20 management and response activities carried out by
21 entities, including—

- 22 (A) the Federal Government;
23 (B) State, Tribal, and local governments;
24 (C) land managers;
25 (D) incident management teams;

1 (E) the National Interagency Coordination
2 Center;

3 (F) geographic coordination centers;

4 (G) land, air, and water managers;

5 (H) burned area rehabilitation teams;

6 (I) public health entities; and

7 (J) other entities identified by the Board;

8 (2) facilitating collaboration and information
9 sharing across Federal and State departments and
10 agencies, Tribal entities, academia, and the private
11 sector on matters relating to wildland fires; and

12 (3) addressing any other issues the Secretary of
13 Agriculture, the Secretary of Commerce, and the
14 Secretary of the Interior identify as issues of joint
15 interest in support of the Center.

16 (b) HEADQUARTERS.—Not later than 1 year after the
17 date of enactment of this Act, the Board shall select a
18 permanent location for a physical headquarters of the
19 Center within the United States.

20 (c) FUNCTIONS.—The functions of the Center shall
21 include the following:

22 (1) Providing real-time, science-based, and
23 data-rich scientific and technical analytical services,
24 decision support, and predictive services across all
25 phases of fire to inform pre-fire land and fuels man-

agement, pre-fire community and built environment risk reduction, active fire management and emergency response, and post-fire recovery in the built and natural environment.

(2) Assessing and monitoring wildland fires and wildland fire conditions across all phases of fire, including ignition, behavior, and spread, climate, weather, drought, soil moisture, fuel conditions, smoke, aerosols, fire severity, debris flows, and erosion.

(3) Comprehensive modeling of wildland fire behavior and risks, including ignitions, wildland fire intensity and spread, structure-to-structure ignition, community and structure vulnerability, air quality, and dependence on burn history, vegetation conditions, climate, and weather.

(4) Providing and combining existing data, mapping, technological, and consultation services to support pre-, active, and post-fire activities, including—

(A) creating and maintaining a real-time nationwide wildland fire risk catalog by leveraging existing risk mapping at land management agencies;

1 (B) assisting with the creation of evacu-
2 ation plans for at-risk communities;

3 (C) assisting with the creation of public
4 safety power shutoff plans;

5 (D) assisting with the creation of wildland
6 fire response strategies, plans, and treatment
7 and mitigation measures;

8 (E) providing gridded and point data fore-
9 cast and assessment products in support of
10 operational and planning activities; and

11 (F) providing a testbed framework for test-
12 ing and evaluation of new tools and products
13 intended for decision support.

14 (5) Consolidating air quality monitoring and
15 forecasting data to support health risk information
16 to help inform risks to public health and protect the
17 public from smoke impacts associated with wildland
18 fires, including providing planning guidance for safe
19 and effective beneficial fire opportunities to prevent
20 the risk of wildland fires.

21 (6) Providing accessible tools and products that
22 support emergency and land management decisions
23 relating to wildland fire prevention, preparedness,
24 and response, including risk assessment and contin-
25 gency planning, which shall include the development

1 of a data interface to assist and inform, in real-time,
2 firefighters, first responders, and approved contrac-
3 tors in responding to wildland fires, including the
4 use of any observations by the civil, military, and in-
5 telligence communities of the Federal Government
6 and commercial Earth observations.

7 (7) Establishing an interoperable information
8 technology infrastructure accessible by Federal agen-
9 cies, State government offices, units of local govern-
10 ment, and Tribal governments.

11 (8) To the extent feasible, establishing data
12 interoperability through—

13 (A) the development of common data
14 standards;

15 (B) the provision of comprehensive search-
16 able data inventories;

17 (C) working with Tribal governments in
18 nation-to-nation partnership;

19 (D) the integration and sharing of infor-
20 mation and resources of the Federal Govern-
21 ment and State and local governments to sup-
22 port the essential functions of the Center;

23 (E) the development of data standards to
24 protect confidential information that may be es-
25 sential to the core functions of the Center;

1 (F) regular updates and maintenance of
2 research and technology essential to achieving
3 the core functions of the Center; and

4 (G) the development and maintenance of a
5 big-data architecture to compile, maintain,
6 standardize, and evaluate data associated with
7 the core functions of the Center.

8 (9) In coordination with relevant Federal agen-
9 cies and coordinating bodies as determined by the
10 Board, and in consultation with State government
11 offices, units of local government, territories of the
12 United States, and federally recognized Indian
13 Tribes, developing and disseminating tools to sup-
14 port wildland fire planning, risk reduction and re-
15 sponse guidance, guidelines, maps, and training ma-
16 terials to help inform State, territorial, local, and
17 Tribal governments and decisionmakers with respect
18 to—

19 (A) the use and implementations of
20 wildland fire risk assessments;

21 (B) the applied use of the database and in-
22 formation developed under paragraphs (7) and
23 (8);

24 (C) reducing losses from wildland fires;

25 (D) increasing benefits from wildland fires;

1 (E) resources available for communities
 2 and responders working to improve wildland
 3 fire preparedness; and

4 (F) enhancing communication management
 5 in emergency wildfire situations, land and re-
 6 source management, and scientific studies.

7 (10) Working with Federal, State, and Tribal
 8 agencies to develop and improve National Wildland
 9 Coordinating Group wildland fire preparedness cur-
 10 ricula and training modules for—

11 (A) State, territorial, local, and Tribal offi-
 12 cials; and

13 (B) Federal, State, territorial, local, and
 14 Tribal emergency managers and responders.

15 (d) ADMINISTRATION.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agri-
 17 culture, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Sec-
 18 retary of the Interior shall cooperatively administer
 19 the Center.

20 (2) TRANSFER OF FUNDS.—

21 (A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-
 22 graph (B), the Secretary of Agriculture, the
 23 Secretary of Commerce, and the Secretary of
 24 the Interior may transfer funds between the
 25 Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmos-

1 pheric Administration, and the United States
2 Geological Survey from funds provided to estab-
3 lish the Center and to carry out the duties of
4 the Center.

5 (B) NOTICE REQUIRED.—Not less than 15
6 days prior to transferring funds under subpara-
7 graph (A), the Secretary of Agriculture, the
8 Secretary of Commerce, or the Secretary of the
9 Interior, as applicable, shall notify the Com-
10 mittee on Appropriations of the Senate and the
11 Committee on Appropriations of the House of
12 Representatives of the proposed transfer.

13 (e) BOARD.—

14 (1) NUMBER AND APPOINTMENT.—The Center
15 shall be governed by a Board, composed of 14 mem-
16 bers, as follows:

17 (A) 1 member who is a career employee of
18 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Admin-
19 istration, to be appointed by the Administrator
20 of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Ad-
21 ministration.

22 (B) 1 member who is a career employee of
23 the United States Fire Administration, to be
24 appointed by the Administrator of the United
25 States Fire Administration.

1 (C) 1 member who is a career employee of
2 the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to
3 be appointed by the Administrator of the Fed-
4 eral Emergency Management Agency.

5 (D) 1 member who is a career employee of
6 the National Weather Service, to be appointed
7 by the Director of the National Weather Serv-
8 ice.

9 (E) 1 member who is a career employee in
10 fire and aviation management of the Forest
11 Service, to be appointed by the Chief of the
12 Forest Service.

13 (F) 1 member who is a career employee of
14 the Department of the Interior, to be appointed
15 by the Secretary of the Interior.

16 (G) 1 member who is a career employee of
17 the Bureau of Land Management, to be ap-
18 pointed by the Director of the Bureau of Land
19 Management.

20 (H) 1 member who is a career employee of
21 the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to be appointed
22 by the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

23 (I) 1 member who is a career employee of
24 the National Park Service, to be appointed by
25 the Director of the National Park Service.

1 (J) 1 member who is a career employee of
2 the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to
3 be appointed by the Director of the United
4 States Fish and Wildlife Service.

5 (K) 1 member who is a career employee of
6 the United States Geological Survey, to be ap-
7 pointed by the Director of the United States
8 Geological Survey.

9 (L) 1 member who is a career employee of
10 the Department of Agriculture, to be appointed
11 by the Secretary of Agriculture.

12 (M) 1 member who is a career employee of
13 the Department of Defense, to be appointed by
14 the Secretary of Defense.

15 (N) 1 member who is a career employee of
16 the research and development areas of the For-
17 est Service, to be appointed by the Chief of the
18 Forest Service.

19 (2) TERMS.—A member of the Board—

20 (A) shall be appointed for a term of 3
21 years; and

22 (B) may be reappointed for not more than
23 3 additional terms.

1 (3) CHAIRPERSON; VICE CHAIRPERSON.—The
 2 Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Board
 3 shall—

4 (A) be selected by the members of the
 5 Board, on a rotating basis, from among the
 6 members appointed under subparagraphs (A),
 7 (K), and (N) of paragraph (1); and

8 (B) serve for a term of 1 year.

9 (4) MAJORITY VOTE.—Voting consensus by the
 10 Board shall be not less than $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote.

11 (5) NONVOTING STATUS.—At the discretion of
 12 the Board, the Board may include nonvoting observ-
 13 ers to the Board.

14 (f) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Center shall have an
 16 Executive Director, who shall be appointed by, and
 17 serve at the direction of, the Board.

18 (2) PRIVATE SECTOR DROUGHT MONITORING.—
 19 The Executive Director of the Center shall engage
 20 with entities in the private sector to improve drought
 21 monitoring, forecasting, communication, and re-
 22 sponse that may be essential to the core functions of
 23 the Center if the Executive Director of the Center
 24 determines that the engagement is appropriate, ben-
 25 eficial, and cost effective.

1 (3) CONTRACTING AUTHORITY.—

2 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Executive Director
3 of the Center may enter into and perform con-
4 tracts, leases, cooperative agreements, or other
5 similar transactions that the Executive Director
6 of the Center determines to be appropriate to
7 carry out the functions of the Center.

8 (B) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after
9 the date of enactment of this Act, the Board
10 and the Executive Director of the Center shall
11 submit to the appropriate committees of Con-
12 gress a report that provides—

13 (i) an assessment of existing con-
14 tracting authorities of the Executive Direc-
15 tor of the Center; and

16 (ii) recommendations on whether new
17 contracting authorities or modifications of
18 existing contracting authorities are needed.

19 (g) DIRECT HIRE AUTHORITY.—The Chairperson of
20 the Board and the Executive Director of the Center may
21 hire qualified candidates to any positions determined to
22 be necessary to carry out the duties of the Center, as di-
23 rected by a consensus vote of the Board in accordance
24 with subsection (e)(4).

1 (h) INTERAGENCY FINANCING.—Notwithstanding
 2 section 708 of the Financial Services and General Govern-
 3 ment Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117–328;
 4 136 Stat. 4706) or any other similar provision of law,
 5 interagency financing may be used to fund the Center.

6 (i) COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND EN-
 7 TITIES.—The Board shall coordinate with agencies rep-
 8 resented on the Board and other relevant entities to
 9 achieve the core functions of the Center, including with—

10 (1) the National Wildfire Coordinating Group;

11 (2) State and Tribal governments;

12 (3) any other agency—

13 (A) that is responsible for the management
 14 of Federal or State land; or

15 (B) that has data, science, and technology
 16 expertise relevant to the Center; and

17 (4) any other relevant Federal, State, Tribal, or
 18 nongovernmental entity that is representative of an
 19 element of the wildland fire community.

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