

Chief Pimlott Speaking Points

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Tuesday, July 15, at 10:30 a.m.

Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C

Senator Feinstein hit the mark with her comments. California, as well as other western states, is facing unprecedented fire conditions. As we speak today, several large fires are burning in the State.

Three years of critically low precipitation have left vegetation parched and ripe to burn.

As a result, Southern California has been in continuous fire season since April of last year (2013). Almost 2000 acres burned on the Angeles National Forest on January 16th. San Diego experienced devastating Santa Ana wind driven fires in May, a phenomenon normally reserved for the fall months.

Northern California experienced large fire activity beginning in January, with fires on the Lassen National Forest and in Humboldt County, normally one of the wettest places in the country.

The number of fires so far this year is well above the average and they are burning with a speed and intensity that would normally occur in the peak of summer or fall.

We did not get to these critical conditions over night. During the last four decades, the average length of fire season in the west has become over 70 days longer.

As we experience the impacts of climate change and periodic drought, the frequency and size of wild fires will only increase in the future.

Therefore, it is critical that we continue to invest in forest management, fire prevention, fuels treatment and a strong wildfire response.

The Western Governors Association and the National Association of State Foresters, organizations that California actively participates in, both support S.1875 as a solution.

A federal budgeting mechanism that fully funds wildland fire response is critical to successfully addressing this growing wildland fire challenge.

An emergency or reserve fund, similar to what California utilizes to address the extraordinary costs of wildland firefighting, is important so that emergency firefighting costs in federal responsibility areas do not impact the federal funds budgeted for forest health, vegetation management and fire prevention program activities.

It takes all of these, combined, to combat the extraordinary conditions we are seeing in the west.