

1 HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 62

2 INTRODUCED BY B. EDWARDS, B. GILLESPIE, G. LAMMERS, D. HARVEY, S. FITZPATRICK, S. GIST, J.
3 KARLEN, E. TILLEMANN
4

5 A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF
6 MONTANA REQUESTING AN INTERIM STUDY OF WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND RESILIENCE; AND
7 REQUIRING THAT THE FINAL RESULTS OF THE STUDY BE REPORTED TO THE 70TH LEGISLATURE.
8

9 WHEREAS, extreme hot, dry, and windy conditions are increasingly prevalent in Montana and
10 throughout the Western United States; and

11 WHEREAS, the conditions in Montana can make fires more frequent, damaging, and expensive to
12 control or suppress, even in areas of prior fuels treatment, which affects the safety of residents and firefighters,
13 the economy, and the health of Montana's lands and waters; and

14 WHEREAS, Montana has the second-highest share of properties at risk in the Western United States,
15 which contributes to insurance unaffordability and inaccessibility and exacerbates an existing housing
16 affordability crisis in the state; and

17 WHEREAS, numerous studies have confirmed alarming statistics about Montana's unique and growing
18 vulnerability to wildfire in the 21st century, such as that more than 70% of all recorded wildfires in Montana
19 history have occurred since 2000, more than 90% of Montana's population is in counties with high wildfire risk,
20 and over the past 20 years wildfires have destroyed more than 1,400 homes, businesses, and other structures
21 in Montana; and

22 WHEREAS, Montana's existing policies and authorities to build for wildfire resilience are not broadly
23 accessible and are not providing community-scale risk reduction; and

24 WHEREAS, Montana faces rapidly rising housing costs that could be exacerbated by catastrophic
25 disasters, further damaging local economies and communities if additional strategies to reduce risk are not
26 taken; and

27 WHEREAS, in the spirit of spurring comprehensive reform, the Legislature recognizes that additional
28 proven policies and strategies to avoid community destruction from fire exist and merit deeper review for the

1 benefit of all Montanans; and

2 WHEREAS, community-scale risk reduction in the form of defensible space around homes, widespread
3 use of wildfire-resistant building materials, and thoughtful planning provide a necessary defense against
4 exacerbating the hazards and risks of wildfires that enter the urban landscape; and

5 WHEREAS, thoughtful risk reduction is affordable, cost-effective and necessary in order to reduce the
6 risk of wildfire damage to Montana communities, help protect firefighters, and offer the potential to improve
7 housing affordability by reducing insurance premiums; and

8 WHEREAS, far-sighted community planning has been shown to provide mutual benefits not only to the
9 state's infrastructure but also to the unique outdoor values that Montanans cherish and rely on to support our
10 local economies, our hunting and fishing traditions, and our time-honored way of life.

11
12 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF
13 THE STATE OF MONTANA:

14 That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee or statutory
15 committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, to examine:

16 (1) the scope of wildfire impacts on communities, including:

17 (a) the prevalence of wildfires' worsening impacts on population centers in the 21st century;

18 (b) the economic, social, and ecological costs of fires in the wildland-urban interface, including how
19 rising costs impact community resilience; and

20 (c) the costs and benefits of postfire rehabilitation and recovery versus prefire home hardening
21 and community resilience through planning;

22 (2) the role of wildfire-focused land use planning in supporting effective wildfire response,
23 including:

24 (a) the role of building materials and nonvegetated buffers, also known as defensible space, in fire
25 spread, speed, and intensity, both on an individual property and on a community-wide scale; and

26 (b) the benefits of maintaining open routes of ingress and egress, water availability, maintained
27 open space buffers, and other innovative land management concepts to improve public safety and reduce the
28 impacts of wildfire on property and communities;

1 (3) the current legal and policy framework regarding wildfire resilience in Montana, specifically:

2 (a) the barriers to widespread adoption of the state's existing laws and regulations; and

3 (b) the factors that reduce the efficacy of the existing framework;

4 (4) solutions that can alleviate risk in Montana, including examples of:

5 (a) how to incentivize action at the community level, including tax incentives, cost-share programs,
6 grant programs, and other pathways to ease property owners' burden; and

7 (b) effective statewide regulation of building materials, development patterns, landscaping
8 guidelines, and vegetation management in the wildland-urban interface, including:

9 (i) how the state can allow local jurisdictions to adopt more robust codes and standards than the
10 state baseline that will allow high-hazard communities to protect homes, businesses, and their economies while
11 not placing an onerous burden on lower-hazard communities;

12 (ii) the role of state agencies in effectively acting as liaisons and experts to municipal government
13 in enacting and enforcing statewide wildfire resilience codes;

14 (iii) the development of hazard and risk maps that can inform property owners and local
15 governments where areas of higher or lower hazard exist; and

16 (iv) solutions that effectively balance oversight and enforcement with on-the-ground conditions and
17 flexibility for property owners.

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study, including presentation and review
19 requirements, be concluded prior to September 15, 2026.

20 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions,
21 comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 70th Legislature.

22 - END -