Biden-Harris Administration’s Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission Releases Report Outlining Comprehensive Recommendations to Change the Nation’s Relationship with Wildfire

Release Date: September 28, 2023

WASHINGTON – Today, the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission released its report outlining a comprehensive, consensus-based set of recommendations to Congress to address the nation’s wildfire crisis.

The Commission, created by President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and announced in December 2021, was charged with making recommendations to Congress to improve federal policies related to the mitigation, suppression and management of wildland fires in the United States, and the rehabilitation of land devastated by wildland fires. Composed of representatives from federal agencies, state, local and Tribal governments, and representatives from the private sector, the Commission has met monthly over the last year to discuss and craft these recommendations.

According to the terms of the statute in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the commission is co-chaired by FEMA, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. The 50 commission members have a broad range of expertise with wildfire, including firefighting, prescribed fire, cultural burning, watershed restoration, pre-fire mitigation, research, public health, post-fire recovery and more.

The Commission’s comprehensive and holistic recommendations provide strategies for transforming our wildland fire response approach from reactive to proactive, building sustainable and long-term solutions, and creating communities.
and landscapes that are more resilient and adaptable to wildfire as a fundamental part of our world. Proposed solutions also strongly support increased collaboration and coordination across scales and jurisdictions, and greater inclusion of all entities within the wildfire system. Taken together, these recommendations are intended to help lead the nation toward a different relationship and experience with wildfire.

“The increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires is a threat to our homeland security,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “The whole of government approach to wildfire prevention, combined with the strategic investments in our workforce recommended by this commission, will ensure DHS personnel remain prepared to go anywhere, anytime extreme weather impacts communities. We are investing over $684 million this year to give local fire departments the personnel, tools, training, and resources to meet these challenge and we look forward to continuing this work with our federal partners in the years to come.”

“The recent disaster on Maui is a tragic reminder of the growing risks of wildfires to communities and the heartbreaking losses they leave behind,” said Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell. “The detailed recommendations provided by this Commission emphasize the urgent need to work across jurisdictions and disciplines to protect our nation’s residents, communities, and natural resources from fire. Together, we will pave a bold new path to wildfire resilience nationwide.”

“As climate change drives longer, more intense and more dangerous wildfires, every community across the country is experiencing the impacts—whether from smoke-filled skies or catastrophic losses,” said Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland. “Under the leadership of President Biden, the Commission’s report will chart a new path forward for the nation on wildland fire mitigation and management, helping to ensure we are building the workforce, resiliency and collaborative approaches needed for the future.”

“The Biden-Harris Administration is using every tool available to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire across the nation’s forests and to strengthen our wildfire preparedness, response and recovery efforts to protect communities, critical infrastructure, and natural resources and restore fire-adapted ecosystems, while taking better care of the people serving on the frontlines,” said
Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “We are thankful for the commission’s diligent work to prepare a comprehensive set of recommendations that will help drive future solutions in confronting our nation’s wildfire crisis and setting up our workforce for success.”

Recommendations outlined in the report can be summarized by seven key themes:

- **Urgent New Approaches**: Historically and institutionally addressed as a land management problem, wildfire -- and the crisis it has become -- spans jurisdictions and ecosystems and threatens critical infrastructure, built environment, public health, and public safety. As such, collective, holistic, cross-boundary action is critical to address the present challenges. Some of the report’s suggestions in this theme include: establishing a Community Wildfire Risk Reduction Program to proactively address risk, change financial incentives and change agency metrics to better focus on performance of ecological health over acres treated.

- **Supporting Collaboration**: Successfully meeting the challenge of wildfire mitigation and management requires approaches that better involve all relevant entities and every scale of society.

- **Shifting from Reactive to Proactive**: Only by putting significantly more focus and resources toward proactive pre-fire and post-fire planning and mitigation can we break the current cycle of increasingly severe wildfire risk, damages, and losses.

- **Enabling Beneficial Fire**: The need to expand beneficial fire, such as prescribed and cultural burning, must be balanced with the public health threats associated with smoke and reduced air quality produced through beneficial fire and implemented through pre-fire planning that helps share decision-making, enable mutual understanding, and facilitate the consideration of tradeoffs associated with various fire response and management decisions.

- **Supporting and Expanding the Workforce**: Federal investment is urgently needed to create a cross-trained year-round workforce that is focused on and tailored to mitigation, planning, and post-fire response and recovery, with strategies in place for recruitment and retention.

- **Modernizing Tools for Informed Decision-making**: The Commission recommends a number of measures that would better coordinate, integrate, and strategically align fire-related science, data and technology.
Investing in Resilience: There is a need for increased funding that is more sustained and predictable, keeps pace with the escalating crisis, and includes a focus on the mitigation of risk and impacts both before and after wildfire is critical and will reduce costs in the long run.

This is the second report to be released by the Commission. The first report, which focused on aerial equipment and a strategy to meet equipment needs through 2030, was released in February.

While the Commission’s focus in this report was on federal legislative action, the solutions proposed are also relevant to state, local, Tribal and territorial governments, the nonprofit, private and academic sectors, and the public at large.

The Commission’s recommendations recognize the urgency and importance of providing increase pay and benefits for federal wildland firefighters, and address a number of related workforce needs. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law supported temporary landmark pay increases for federal wildland firefighters, which aim to bring federal firefighter pay in alignment with their state and local counterparts, while aiding in recruitment and retention of a more permanent and stable wildland firefighting force across the federal government.

The Commission’s recommendations were informed by the Department of the Interior’s “Five-Year Monitoring, Maintenance, and Treatment Plan,” which provides a roadmap for addressing wildfire risk on Department of the Interior-managed and Tribal lands. They were also informed by USDA Forest Service’s “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis” strategy, which aims to treat 20 million acres of national forests and grasslands and 30 million acres of state, local, Tribal and private lands over the next 10 years to reduce wildfire risk where it matters most. These plans help facilitate the collaborative work between the two Departments. In total, President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act include over $7 billion in funding across the interagency to enhance our ability to mitigate and respond to wildfires.

The Commission’s work builds on existing interagency federal efforts, such as the Wildland Fire Leadership Council and the White House Wildfire Resilience Interagency Working Group. The Biden-Harris administration will continue to pursue an all-of-government approach to wildfire risk reduction and resilience.
For more information visit the commission website or email wildlandfirecommission@usda.gov.