

NAR Issue Summaries

Environment / Wildfires

NAR Committee:

Land Use, Property Rights and Environment Committee

What is the fundamental issue?

More and more development is occurring in areas that have historically had risk of wildfires, especially in the far West, Intermountain West and the South. At the same time that more properties are being built, the frequency and intensity of wildfires have increased. The past decade has seen more wildfires and more intense wildfires, than at any other time in country's history. These so-called "mega-fires" are placing more of these new developments, and the people who live in them, in harm's way.

I am a real estate professional. What does this mean for my business?

Wildfires impact real estate agents and the real estate sector in a variety of ways. Properties that are built in areas that are known to be at a higher risk of wildfires may lose value as a result of that risk, especially if that risk increases over time. Insurance companies are declining to write insurance policies in these higher risk areas, are dropping coverage or dramatically increasing premiums. Building practices and mitigation activities taken to reduce the property's risk may be effective but also may be prohibitively expensive for the owner, thereby reducing the number of people who could possibly purchase the property.

NAR Policy:

NAR supports federal legislation and regulation that encourage active forest management practices which will help return the ecological benefits of fire to our forested areas, bring balance to our nation's firefighting policies, and protect homes and communities in the wildland/urban interface. These practices may include - but are not limited to - forest thinning, fuel reduction, and strategic use of prescribed burns and wildfire suppression.

NAR supports increased private sector management of public land in concert with this policy.

The application of environmental laws and regulations should be coordinated with active forest management practices so as not to prohibit such practices on private as well as public land.

NAR policy encourages better planning for the environmental and economic impacts on communities after wildfires have occurred.

Opposition Arguments:

If people live in areas with increased risk of wildfires, they should be prepared to pay the cost of living in that area and mitigating the risk. In addition, wildfires are a natural process that many forested areas, particularly in the west, depend on for a healthy forest. Therefore, the best practice is to let wildfires burn with minimal interference.

Legislative/Regulatory Status/Outlook

Lack of adequate funding in the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior to fight wildfires effectively, create defensible space in communities and transfer lands from the public to the private sector is always a critical issue.

In light of these concerns, NAR supported H.R. 2647, "The Resilient Federal Forests Act", which streamlines the process for fighting wildfires, addresses funding deficiencies and incentivizes the private sector to clean out publicly managed forests of dead wood. These approaches will encourage more active forest management activities, and more effectively leverage the private sector to manage more public lands and transferring more public lands into private hands. This bill passed Congress and was signed by the President in December 2016.

NAR continues its on-going annual appropriations efforts and other stand-alone legislation to ensure that fire-fighting agencies have sufficient resources to address the increased frequency and severity of wildfires and to encourage active forest management practices and private sector land ownership.

Current Legislation/Regulation (bill number or regulation)

None at this time.

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