

## Governor signs measure to improve forest management

Written by Staff Reports  
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SANTA FE — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed House Bill 57 into law March 18. HB 57 is an environmental measure that will help the state improve forest management amid a changing climate through the use of prescribed burns, which will lessen the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

“The Prescribed Burning Act is an important proactive action for our state to ensure our forests and watersheds provide clean water and other benefits for future generations – while recognizing and mitigating the impacts of a changing climate,” **Lujan Grisham said.**

The bill – sponsored by Rep. Matthew McQueen, D-Santa Fe, Rep. Gail Armstrong, R-Magdalena, Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth, D-Santa Fe and Sen. Pat Woods, R- Curry County – was a product of months of extensive stakeholder outreach following the passage of House Memorial 42 in 2019, which created a working group led by the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to study expanding the use of prescribed burns for healthy and resilient forests.

EMNRD’s Forestry Division brought together landowners, tribal members, environmental and agricultural groups, and forest and watershed experts to draft a bill that would benefit all New Mexicans.

“The Prescribed Burning Act is a perfect example of a diverse coalition coming together to develop good legislation that will have a positive benefit for New Mexico’s forests and watersheds for years to come,” EMNRD Cabinet **Secretary Sarah Cottrell Propst said.**

“Prescribed burns are a proven tool to reduce the intensity of wildfires which is crucially

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important as we enter another long and dry fire season.”

At a time when New Mexico – and indeed all of the Western United States – is experiencing longer and more intense fire seasons due to a warming climate, prescribed burns allow the state to avoid catastrophic fires and better manage forests for future generations. Prescribed burns are an important tool for forest management by removing excess vegetation that can fuel fires in forests and grasslands.

Throughout the legislative session the bill enjoyed widespread bipartisan and diverse stakeholder support, highlighting the importance of bringing everyone to the table before the session in order to produce common-sense legislation.

The Prescribed Burning Act establishes a negligence standard of liability for private landowners who conduct prescribed burns, making insurance more available and affordable. This has resulted in an increased pace and scale of prescribed burning in other states that have enacted similar legislation. The bill also establishes a new certified prescribed burn manager training program in cooperation with the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service. This program will improve the safety of prescribed burning on private lands.