

New Mexico House, Senate pass critical forestry bills

Written by gallupsun
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The New Mexico Legislature has passed two bills that enhance the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department's Forestry Division's efforts to

mitigate the impact of climate change and wildfires on forest lands.

The two bills, HB 195 and SB 206

, clear the way for the state Forestry Division to implement modern conservation techniques and practices that will increase natural landscape adaptation within New Mexico's most vulnerable forests and watersheds.

House Bill 195, sponsored by Representatives Matthew McQueen and Greg Nibert and Senator Pat Woods, updates the Forest Conservation Act of 1939, which designated the State Forestry Division as the lead agency for wildfire suppression and forest management on 43 million acres of state and private lands.

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This act was last updated 35 years ago.

HB 195 adds language to clearly delineate the Forestry Division's authority to carry out tasks—such as projects to stabilize steep slopes after they have burned—that contribute to the long-term health of forested watersheds.

Senate Bill 206, otherwise known as the Forestry Division Procurement Exemption, was sponsored by Senators Carrie Hamblin and Woods along with McQueen and Nibert. It creates a minor exemption in the State Procurement Code to make it easier for the Forestry Division to work with non-governmental organizations to execute wildfire prevention and restoration programs.

Specifically, the bill allows the Forestry Division to issue federal grant funds to NGOs without going through a competitive bidding process if those organizations already have gone through a federal bidding process in which they were deemed eligible to receive federal grant funds. Without that exemption, NGOs were forced to

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participate in two separate bidding processes to receive funds from federal grants administered by the state Forestry Division.

This exemption should streamline the process of getting federal funds to communities that suffer damage from wildfires or other disasters. It should, for example, accelerate the distribution of funds to local communities from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, which authorized the allocation of \$1 billion in Community Wildfire Defense Grants over five years.

“As our neighbors continue to recover from last year’s devastating wildfire season, the New Mexico Forestry Division welcomes the passage of these two critical pieces of legislation,” State Forester Laura McCarthy said. “They will help

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improve our ability to
fortify our forests and watershed
s
to better withstand
future wildfires, while also
equipping us to act more quickly and decisively in
restoring any land or property
damaged in
fires.”

These bills now head to Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's desk for consideration.

