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State Senate unanimously passes landmark Wildfire Protection Bill

Bill to make homes safer from wildfire advances to the House of Representatives

SANTA FE – Senate Bill 33, establishing grant programs to help New Mexicans fortify their properties to better withstand wildfires, passed the State Senate today on a unanimous vote.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Elizabeth Stefanics and Rep. Harlan Vincent, now moves to the House of Representatives.

The measure creates grant programs to help both local governments and private citizens fortify properties to better withstand wildfires. It also expands an existing Fire Planning Task Force and charges it with developing guidelines for certifying properties as "wildfire prepared."

The wildfire prepared certification is expected to make it easier for property owners to secure and maintain insurance coverage.

"The 2,500-plus structures lost to wildfires between 2022 and 2024 alone underscore the need for this critical legislation," said **EMNRD Sec. Designate Melanie Kenderdine**. "It will give homeowners resources to make their properties safer and maintain insurance coverage, while, at the same time, helping to protect our neighborhoods and communities."

The legislation would create two types of grants:

- Funding for political subdivisions (counties, municipalities) to organize neighborhoods to modify structures, reduce hazardous fuels, and certify properties as wildfire prepared.
- Financial assistance for eligible property owners to implement necessary structural and property improvements to retrofit and harden their homes.

The expanded Fire Planning Task Force would include the State Superintendent of Insurance as well as insurance industry representatives, emergency management officials and wildfire

science experts. The panel would rely on research about homes that survived wildfires in Lahaina, Hawaii and southern California to develop guidelines for the wildfire prepared certification.

"New Mexico is no stranger to wildfire, but the increasing loss of homes is heart breaking," said **State Forester Laura McCarthy**. “Having 80% or more homes in a neighborhood meet the protection standards outlined in this bill will significantly reduce the risk of catastrophic loss."



A home and landscape after the South Fork Fire in Ruidoso. (Photo by Laura Doth)

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