



COLORADO
WATER CONGRESS
INFORM | CONVENE | TRAIN | ACT

SB21-113

SHORT TITLE: Firefighting Aircraft Wildfire Management and Response

LONG TITLE: Concerning state funding of firefighting aircraft to respond to wildfires.

COMMITTEES: Senate Appropriations Committee and House Appropriations Committee

SPONSORS: Sens. Fenberg and Rankin/Reps. McCluskie and Lynch

PURPOSE OF THE BILL: To provide additional fiscal resources for wildfire suppression including the purchase or rental of a firefighting helicopter and to provide firefighting suppression assistance to county sheriffs, municipal fire districts or protection districts at no cost. Originally the bill only addressed the purchase or lease of the helicopter; amendment in Appropriations committee resulted in addition of assistance to local officials in charge of fire emergencies.

PROPONENTS OF THE BILL: The Governor? Local governments impacted or at risk of wildfire.

POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS: Water providers and users, water treatment facilities, local governments including special districts, fire districts, county sheriffs, emergency planning agencies.

BACKGROUND: 2020 was a year that saw deadly and destructive wildfires that have took lives, destroyed millions of dollars in property, and devastated forests as well as closing I-70, the major E-W highway through the state for days. Some of the fires moved with unprecedented speed making it difficult to prevent the damage and resulted in evacuations of entire communities. There is a SuperTanker Aircraft housed in Colorado Springs, but Colorado has no control over its deployment. It is argued that a firefighting helicopter may provide flexibility to respond to fires when they are still small and operate at night when winds are lower.

Is this bill necessary this year? Some would argue that a tactical fire suppression helicopter is necessary for target response early in a fire outbreak. Is there supporting data from other states?

How does the bill change current law? It takes money from the General Fund to support fire suppression activities.

Does the bill affect the prior appropriations system? No.

How is the bill implemented? Money would be transferred to a fund by the State Treasurer to the Dept. of Public Safety for the purposes set forth in the bill.

Practical considerations: The JBC has discussed how to balance the needs to fund fire suppression versus mitigation versus restoration and recovery. These are policies that must be considered when determining how to allocate finite resources.

Fiscal Impact: \$30.8 million from the General Fund.