



Office of the Governor

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

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**Gov. signs bipartisan measure to improve forest
management,
help N.M. avoid catastrophic fires**
Four other measures also made law

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Thursday signed into law House Bill 57, an important environmental measure that will help the state improve forest management amid a changing climate through prescribed burns, which will contribute to lessening the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

“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,” said Gov. Lujan Grisham.

The bill – sponsored by Rep. Matthew McQueen, Rep. Gail Armstrong, Senate Majority Leader Peter Wirth and Sen. Pat Woods – 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,” said EMNRD Cabinet Secretary Sarah Cottrell Propst. “Prescribed burns are a proven tool to reduce the intensity of wildfires which is crucially 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 our 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 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.

The governor on Thursday also signed into law the following measures:

- Senate Bill 35 – which aligns the state’s minimum wage for employees under 18 with the minimum wage for adults. The state minimum wage as of Jan. 1, 2021, is \$10.50 an hour and is scheduled to increase to \$12 an hour by 2023. Previously, under the state Minimum Wage Act, there was a separate minimum wage for persons under 18. Senate Bill 35 was sponsored by Sen. Jeff Steinborn.
- House Bill 22 – which amends the Grow Your Own Teachers Act signed in 2019 by Gov. Lujan Grisham to expand the definition of [who may qualify for the scholarship program](#) and permit all educational assistants, regardless of scholarship awardee status, to seek professional leave toward the completion of a four-year teaching program. House Bill 22 was sponsored by Rep. Joy Garratt, Sen. Michael Padilla, Rep. Natalie Figueroa, Rep. Raymundo Lara and Rep. Melanie Stansbury.
- House Bill 52 – which establishes the 15-member Bilingual Multicultural Education Advisory Council in statute and provides for its duties, which include advising the Public Education Department on the curriculum, instruction, assessment, educator preparation and evaluation, professional development, educator licensure and student and family services with respect to the implementation of the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act. House Bill 52 was sponsored by Rep. Natalie Figueroa and supported in committee by various advocacy organizations from across the state.
- House Bill 157 – which creates a mining act forfeiture fund, clarifying and ensuring that any financial assurance forfeited to the state by mine operators that have defaulted on their reclamation obligations under state law are deposited

into an interest-bearing account and used only for the specific reclamation project or closeout plan to which the forfeited financial assurance applies. If the implementation of a reclamation project or closeout is expected to exceed five years, the forfeited financial assurance may be invested through the State Investment Council to cover long-term costs of implementation of the project or closeout. House Bill 157 was sponsored by Rep. Nathan Small.

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