

LFC Requester: _____

**AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS
2025 REGULAR SESSION**

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Check all that apply:

Original Amendment _____
Correction _____ Substitute _____

Date January 29, 2025
Bill No: HB175

Sponsor: Reps. Harlan Vincent, Kristina Ortez, Anita Gonzales, Rebecca Dow
Short Title: Forest and Watershed Buffer Projects

Agency Name and Code Number: Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department - 521
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SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY25	FY26		

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY25	FY26	FY27		

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY25	FY26	FY27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total						

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

**Duplicates/Conflicts with/Companion to/Relates to:
SB33 – Wildfire Prepared Act**

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis: HB 175 will amend sections of the Forest and Watershed Restoration Act to make projects that create or maintain buffers in and around wildland-urban interfaces eligible for recurring funding from the Forest Land Protection Revolving Fund. The bill provides definitions for terms such as buffer, high-risk area, structure, and wildland-urban interface.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The Forest and Watershed Restoration Act was passed by the legislature in 2019 with \$2 million of recurring funding in the Forest Land Protection Revolving Fund. HB175 will allow projects that create or maintain a buffer in or around a wildland-urban interface to access these funds.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The devastating fires in 2022 in San Miguel and Mora Counties, and in 2024 in Otero and Lincoln Counties revealed the extreme vulnerability of communities that live near natural landscapes. Unmanaged vegetation and lack of strategic buffer zones create a dangerous environment where wildfires can rapidly spread from natural areas into residential neighborhoods, putting homes, lives, and entire communities at critical risk.

HB175 will provide a recurring funding source for buffers between natural areas and communities to slow the spread of wildfire before it reaches structures. The buffer zones change fire behavior and fire movement by creating strategic barriers between natural vegetation and residential areas, providing critical time for emergency response and evacuation. Firefighters will have safer, more defensible operational areas from which to combat approaching wildfires, improving their ability to protect communities and minimizing potential damage. The strategic placement of these buffers will increase the likelihood of suppressing fires before they ignite structures, potentially preventing catastrophic community-wide fire events. By creating intentional separation between natural fuel sources and human settlements, HB175 bill offers a scientifically informed approach to wildfire risk management.

HB175 addresses the need for buffers on private lands when the division makes a written determination that the incidental benefit to a private landowner is outweighed by the fire reduction or watershed restoration benefits to the state. Many proposed buffers on federal lands have been stalled by lack of funding, environmental review, or capacity. HB175 will give the state the ability to strategically locate buffers where they are most needed.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

The need for buffers is well established and HB175 provides funding to create buffers in and around high-risk wildland-urban interface communities and watersheds vulnerable to catastrophic

wildfire.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HB175 will require the Forestry Division and Forest and Watershed Restoration Act advisory board to develop criteria for applicable buffer projects.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

TECHNICAL ISSUES

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

ALTERNATIVES

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

If HB175 is not enacted the Forestry Division will not be able to access \$2 million of recurring funds to create buffer areas with Forest Land Protection Revolving Funds. Where the strategic placement of buffers is on federal lands, such as national forests, the state will be dependent on those agencies taking action, even if no action means that communities will be harmed. Where private landowners are willing for buffers to be created on their lands, the Forestry Division will not be able to take direct action without relying upon federal funding. The effectiveness of buffers will be reduced if they are discontinuous and located based on opportunity without strategic placement based on terrain, prevailing winds, and slope orientation.

AMENDMENTS