

March 18, 2003  
*Make Sure Firebugs on Public Lands Get Burned*



**Co-Sponsor HR 1038, The Public Lands Fire Regulations Enhancement Act**

Dear Colleague,

Over the last ten years, people have been responsible for the ignition of just over one million wildfires on our public lands. That is around 100,000 fires per year - on average - that are caused by human carelessness. By comparison, lightning has caused only about one-tenth that many fires over the same time period. In Colorado last year, for example, more than 700 human caused wildfires destroyed nearly half-a-million acres.

The current penalties for violating existing fire regulations specify a maximum fine of \$500 dollars and six months imprisonment for offenders on Forest Service lands. In a practical sense, however, the fines are generally assessed at a far lower level, and jail time is rarely imposed. Generally, that means fines are set in the range of \$50 to \$100 - lacking any real deterrent value for would-be violators. I believe that enacting stiffer penalties for those who choose to disregard the directives of our land managers may be one way we can help to reduce the number of human caused wildfires, and the terrible destruction that they leave in their wake.

Last year prior to the Hayman wildfire, I met with a small group of Forest Service rangers and firemen in my district. One of them told me a story about how a prospective visitor to a Colorado national forest had contacted him inquiring about the potential fines for violating a recently imposed ban on campfires. After the district ranger explained to him that the fine for violating the fire ban was around \$50, *the caller asked if there was a way to pay the fine in advance.* These folks tell me that one of their largest challenges in enforcing the bans is the lack of deterrent that these small fines carry.

That is why I have introduced HR 1038. This bi-partisan legislation - which was adopted unanimously by the House Resources Committee last Congress - would stiffen the penalties for those who disregard fire bans. It would increase and standardize the penalties for violators on all Interior and Forest Service lands by establishing a minimum fine of \$1,000, and a maximum jail sentence of 12 months for violations that result in damage to property.

Please contact Mac Zimmerman at x.57882 if you would like to become a cosponsor, and join me in making sure that people who play with fire on our public lands get burned.

Sincerely,

Tom Tancredo  
Member of Congress

**Current Cosponsors: Udall (CO), McInnis, DeGette, Hefley, Beauprez, Musgrave**