

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To require the Secretary of Energy to establish a grant program to improve the reliability of the power grid and reduce the risk of wildfires caused by power lines, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. WYDEN (for himself and Mr. MERKLEY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Energy to establish a grant program to improve the reliability of the power grid and reduce the risk of wildfires caused by power lines, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Wildfire and Grid Reli-
5 ability Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. WILDFIRE AND GRID RELIABILITY PROGRAM.**

7 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-
2 ty” means an electric utility, including—

3 (A) a publicly owned electric utility;

4 (B) a municipal electric utility;

5 (C) a cooperatively owned electric utility;

6 (D) an investor-owned electric utility; and

7 (E) a Federal agency or federally owned
8 corporation that is an electric utility (as defined
9 in section 3 of the Federal Power Act (16
10 U.S.C. 796)).

11 (2) POWER LINE.—The term “power line” in-
12 cludes a transmission line or a distribution line, as
13 applicable.

14 (3) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means
15 the program established under subsection (b).

16 (4) RELIABILITY.—The term “reliability”, with
17 respect to the power grid, includes the ability to
18 withstand natural disasters, such as earthquakes, ice
19 storms, wind storms, snow storms, heat storms, and
20 other natural disasters.

21 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
22 the Secretary of Energy.

23 (b) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 90 days after
24 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
25 tablish within the Office of Electricity a program under

1 which the Secretary shall make grants to eligible entities
2 to carry out activities that—

3 (1) are supplemental to existing power grid-
4 hardening efforts of the eligible entity planned for
5 any given year;

6 (2) are designed to enhance public safety; and

7 (3)(A) reduce the risk of any power lines owned
8 or operated by the eligible entity causing a wildfire;
9 or

10 (B) increase the reliability of the power grid.

11 (c) APPLICATION.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity desiring a
13 grant under the program shall submit to the Sec-
14 retary an application at such time, in such manner,
15 and containing such information as the Secretary
16 may require.

17 (2) REQUIREMENT.—As a condition of receiving
18 a grant under the program, an eligible entity shall
19 submit to the Secretary as part of the application of
20 the eligible entity under paragraph (1)—

21 (A) a wildfire mitigation plan, if the eligi-
22 ble entity seeks a grant for purposes of imple-
23 menting a project or otherwise carrying out ac-
24 tivities to reduce wildfire risk, as described in
25 subsection (b)(3)(A); or

1 (B) a report detailing past, current, and
2 future efforts by the eligible entity to improve
3 the reliability of the power grid if the eligible
4 entity seeks a grant for purposes of increasing
5 the reliability of the power grid.

6 (d) USE OF GRANT FUNDS.—An eligible entity may
7 use a grant provided under the program—

8 (1) for the undergrounding of new and existing
9 power lines and circuits;

10 (2) to harden overhead power lines with fire re-
11 sistant or more resilient equipment, such as steel
12 poles and covered wires;

13 (3) to replace obsolete overhead conductors and
14 underground cables;

15 (4) to install fast-tripping protection systems;

16 (5) to construct and operate 1 or more weather
17 monitoring stations;

18 (6) to install fault location equipment or early
19 fault detection equipment;

20 (7) for the relocation of power lines to road-
21 ways;

22 (8) to carry out vegetation or fuels management
23 activities in accordance with Federal, State, and
24 local laws (including regulations);

1 (9) to install technology or equipment to miti-
2 gate hazards from or to animals and related damage
3 to the power grid;

4 (10) to install cameras, sensors, or other tech-
5 nology that provides real-time information about
6 conditions;

7 (11) to install technology to detect downed con-
8 ductors;

9 (12) for the installation of electrical facilities
10 necessary to sustain targeted microgrid operations,
11 including storage for the integration of distributed
12 energy resources into power grid operations, for the
13 benefit of community resilience following a main
14 power grid outage;

15 (13) to harden facilities, substations, and other
16 systems for seismic events; and

17 (14) for other, related power grid upgrades to
18 reduce the risk of wildfire ignition or damage from
19 natural disasters.

20 (e) PRIORITY.—In making grants under the program,
21 the Secretary shall give priority to projects that, in the
22 determination of the Secretary, will generate the greatest
23 community benefit in improving power grid reliability or
24 reducing the risk of wildfire ignition from power lines or
25 equipment relative to the cost of the project.

1 (f) SET ASIDES.—

2 (1) WILDFIRE SET ASIDE.—In making grants
3 under the program, the Secretary shall ensure that
4 not less than 40 percent of the total amounts made
5 available to eligible entities under the program are
6 made available to eligible entities that seek a grant
7 for purposes of implementing a project or otherwise
8 carrying out activities to reduce wildfire risk, as de-
9 scribed in subsection (b)(3)(A).

10 (2) SMALL UTILITIES SET ASIDE.—In making
11 grants under the program, the Secretary shall en-
12 sure that not less than 20 percent of the amounts
13 made available to eligible entities under the program
14 are made available to eligible entities that sell not
15 more than 4,000,000 megawatt-hours of electricity
16 per year.

17 (g) MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
19 graph (2), as a condition of receiving a grant under
20 the program, an eligible entity shall provide match-
21 ing funds in the form of cash or an in-kind contribu-
22 tion in an amount equal to not less than 100 percent
23 of the amounts made available under the grant.

24 (2) EXCEPTION FOR SMALL UTILITIES.—With
25 respect to an eligible entity that sells not more than

1 (ii) eligible entities to which the Sec-
2 retary has provided a grant under the pro-
3 gram; and

4 (B) provide grants to eligible entities for
5 the hiring or retention of individuals to provide
6 and support, on a professional basis, assistance
7 (including technical assistance) and informed
8 decisionmaking in the planning, financing, and
9 implementation of 1 or more activities described
10 in subsection (d).

11 (2) TREATMENT.—Grants under paragraph
12 (1)(B)—

13 (A) shall not be counted toward a set-aside
14 described in subsection (f); and

15 (B) shall not be subject to subsection (g).

16 (j) BIENNIAL REPORT.—Not later than 2 years after
17 the date of enactment of this Act, and every 2 years there-
18 after, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on En-
19 ergy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Com-
20 mittee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Rep-
21 resentatives a report describing the manner in which, and
22 the extent to which—

23 (1) the reliability of the power grid has in-
24 creased under the program during the period cov-
25 ered by the report; and

1 (2) the risk of wildfires caused by power lines
2 has been reduced under the program during the pe-
3 riod covered by the report.

4 (k) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
5 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry
6 out the program \$15,000,000,000 for each of fiscal years
7 2027 through 2036.