



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Reducing the Risk of Wildfires

JEFFERSON CITY – Despite the recent round of severe storms that dumped heavy rain over much of Missouri, most of the state remains under drought conditions. The U.S. Drought Monitor, posted each week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, shows that except for southeast Missouri, the state is considered abnormally dry or experiencing moderate drought. In southwest Missouri, drought conditions are labeled severe to extreme. The National Weather Service forecasts drought conditions in Missouri to persist through June, with some improvement possible.

The National Weather Service issued a Fire Weather Watch for the Missouri Ozarks earlier this year, when wildfires were raging throughout Oklahoma and Texas. As we approach the warmer weather of spring and summer, the likelihood of wildland fires will increase in Missouri.

In an effort to prevent wildfires, which destroy property and endanger the lives of property owners and firefighters, I am sponsoring Senate Bill 1198. This legislation will make it illegal to set a fire in an area that has been proclaimed by the governor to be in extraordinary danger from fire. This includes building campfires or bonfires or burning trash when emergency drought conditions exist and the governor has declared a fire danger.

SB 1198 also would allow local governments and volunteer fire protection associations to go to court to seek recovery of the costs of responding to a fire started by someone who violates a burn ban.

State Fire Marshal Randy Cole has been stressing the importance of avoiding a repeat of the devastation that occurred in Texas and Oklahoma and is working to raise the public's awareness of the effect weather conditions have in relation to open burning.

With drought conditions expected to persist at least through June in most of Missouri, Missourians must exercise caution when burning leaves and other dead vegetation on their property. They should refrain from burning altogether if the governor issues an executive order declaring an extraordinary fire danger or if their local government issues a burn ban.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.