

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HCR 4424

As Reported by House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Brief Description: Studying ways to improve fire fighting.

Sponsors: Representatives Sump, Armstrong, Morell, Doumit and Rockefeller.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/6/02 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Natural Resources, Parks and Shorelines Committee to jointly review the current procedures used to mobilize resources to fight forest fires. Requires recommendations to be reported to the Legislature by January 1, 2003.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Doumit, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Sump, Ranking Minority Member; Buck, Eickmeyer, Ericksen, Jackley, McDermott, Orcutt, Pearson and Upthegrove.

Staff: Bill Lynch (786-7092).

Background:

The state devotes a large amount of resources to fight forest fires in the state. Concerns have been expressed about whether these resources are being used as efficiently as possible. Some specific areas of concern that have been identified include: the state mobilization plan does not allow private contractors to be mobilized even if they are the closest resource to a fire; there is no agreement between Washington and Oregon regarding the use of private contractors; and the need to improve training as well as the dispatch system.

Summary of Bill:

The House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Natural Resources, Parks and Shorelines Committee must jointly review the current procedures used to mobilize resources to fight forest fires under the state mobilization plan and forest fires that remain local in nature. The committees must review recent studies that made recommendations relating to ways to improve fighting forest fires in the state. The recommendations must address ways to ensure that the closest people to a fire are called first, allowing private contractors to be mobilized under the state mobilization plan, and other efficiencies.

The committees must consult with representatives of private contractors, fire districts, municipal fire departments, the Department of Natural Resources, the State Fire Marshall, appropriate federal agencies, and other interested groups in developing the recommendations.

Staffing for the committees is provided by the House and Senate committee staff. The committees must report their findings and recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2003.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Testimony For: There is a lot of support for this study based upon all the people who came and testified at the hearing held earlier this session on improving the way the state fights forest fires. The costs of fighting forest fires has gone up considerably in recent years. If local resources are used more efficiently then costs could be reduced. The Governor has a group of people looking at improving the state mobilization plan, so the committees can review their findings.

(With concerns) State mobilization is a success, but there is a chance to make improvements. Municipal fire departments should continue to be listed as a stakeholder group in the bill. The fire defense committee could also assist in this review effort.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Sump, prime sponsor; and Mark Kahley, Department of Natural Resources.

(With concerns) Dan Packer, Washington Fire Chief's Association.