

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5217

As of January 31, 2001

Title: An act relating to forest fire protection assessments.

Brief Description: Extending the time period in which a landowner may apply for a refund of a forest fire protection assessment.

Sponsors: Senators Winsley, Hargrove, Swecker, T. Sheldon, Morton, Parlette, Long, Oke and Hewitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines: 2/5/01.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS & SHORELINES

Staff: Victor Moon (786-7469)

Background: The Department of Natural Resources protects more than 12 million acres of state and private forests in Washington. The department works closely with local fire districts and other state and federal agencies. In 1997, the Legislature asked for an independent review of the program. The review found that while the department's program was effective, the program lacks sufficient, qualified personnel and equipment to manage large fires in the state of Washington.

Fire fighting costs have increased in recent years. It is more costly to both fight fires and to prevent fires. Urban spread in forested and range areas has increased fire danger. In addition, the forests which have not had fires have woody debris and leaf buildups which are a contributing factor to fires. Current state funding for the fire program is a shared responsibility between the state and large and small, private landowners. An assessment of \$14.50 is charged to property owners of parcels of less than 50 acres, and on parcels more than 50 acres \$.22 per acre is charged. This annual fee is collected by the county assessors and transferred to the Department of Natural Resources. Present law allows that owners of more than one parcel of less than 50 acres can ask for a refund of their assessment so that they pay only \$14.50, no matter how many parcels they own as long as they pay the assessment on two parcels.

Summary of Bill: The applications for refunds which are submitted to the department may be submitted within three years after paying the assessment sought to be refunded.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

