
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 1677

Brief Description: Giving preference to using the nearest available qualified firefighters upon notification of a forest fire.

Sponsors: Representatives Short, Kretz and Schmick.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the county commissioners in each county within the state to establish and maintain a list of private contract firefighters and entities qualified and available to provide fire suppression services in each county and to transmit the list, updated yearly, to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Requires the DNR to compile and maintain a statewide list of private contract firefighters and entities organized according to regions and to determine, within one hour of learning of a fire, whether government resources are available to be deployed for initial suppression and, if such resources are unavailable, the DNR must contact the local organization for emergency services or management to coordinate and use the contract firefighters and entities on the statewide list who are able to respond most quickly to the fire due to geographic proximity.

Hearing Date: 2/5/15

Staff: Peter Clodfelter (786-7127).

Background:

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the agency of the state with the direct charge and responsibility over all matters pertaining to forest fire services in the state. The DNR is required to employ sufficient numbers of personnel to extinguish or prevent the spreading of any fire that may be in danger of damaging or destroying any timber or other property of the DNR. Also, when in the state's best interest and for the purposes of forest firefighting and patrol, the DNR

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may cooperate with any agency of another state, the United States or a federal agency, and any county, town, corporation, person, or native American tribe. Further, the DNR may contract and enter agreements with private corporations for the protection and development of the forest lands within the state.

Within the state's comprehensive program of emergency management is the State Fire Services Mobilization Plan (Mobilization Plan). The Mobilization Plan's purpose is to provide policy and organizational structure for large scale mobilization of firefighting resources in the state. The Mobilization Plan includes mutual aid agreements and state reimbursement for outside jurisdictions, as well as a host jurisdiction if its resources are exhausted.

The Mobilization Plan designates nine regions within the state, each consisting of several counties (e.g., the Northeast region, the Northwest region, the Southwest region, etc.). Each region has a fire defense board consisting of two members from each member county. The boards develop regional service plans for mutual aid responses that are consistent with the incident command system and the Mobilization Plan.

Summary of Bill:

The county commissioners of each county within the state are required to establish and maintain a list of private contract firefighters, firms, corporations, and individuals qualified and available to provide fire suppression services in each county. The county commissioners must develop the list while considering the person or entity's firefighting experience, knowledge of local terrain, geography, and community resources, and ownership of or access to and experience with fire suppression equipment. Each county is obligated to update the list and provide the list to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and to the county's local organization for emergency services or management by June 1 of each year.

Based on the lists submitted by counties, the DNR is required to compile and maintain a statewide list of private contract firefighters and entities that is organized according to the same regions that are delineated in the State Fire Service Mobilization Plan (Mobilization Plan).

Within one hour of learning of an active fire, the DNR is required to determine whether government resources are available to be deployed for initial suppression. Initial suppression is defined as the period of time consisting of the first 10 hours after the DNR receives notification of or otherwise learns of an active forest fire. If the DNR determines it lacks sufficient resources to suppress the fire during initial suppression, the DNR is required to contact the local organization for emergency services or management to coordinate and use the people and entities on the statewide list who are able to respond most quickly to the fire due to geographic proximity. Persons or entities responding who perform fire suppression activities may be reimbursed only if the Mobilization Plan is subsequently mobilized as a result of the fire.

Existing regional fire service plans are required to include a strategy to utilize geographically convenient private contract firefighters and other individuals available to provide fire suppression services.

The state may be civilly liable for direct or proximate adverse impacts resulting from actions taken during the initial suppression period by the state and by persons and entities used by the

DNR during the initial suppression period only upon proof of gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.