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**Agriculture & Natural Resources  
Committee**

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**2SSB 5546**

**Brief Description:** Concerning proactively addressing wildfire risk by creating a forest health treatment assessment.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Hawkins, McCoy, Fortunato, Pearson, Braun, Sheldon, Rivers and O'Ban).

**Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill**

- Directs the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a forest health assessment and treatment framework that proactively and systematically addresses the forest health issues facing the state.
- Directs the DNR to utilize the framework to assess and treat fire prone lands in an incremental fashion each biennium.
- Directs the DNR, by December 1st of each even-numbered year, to submit to the Legislature and to the Office of Financial Management a request for funding to accomplish assessment and treatment work for the upcoming biennium, a list of treatments planned to be conducted, and a list of treatments carried out in the preceding biennium.
- Directs the DNR to establish a Forest Health Advisory Committee to assist the DNR in developing the forest health assessment and treatment framework.

**Hearing Date:** 3/16/17

**Staff:** Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

**Background:**

Department of Natural Resources' Fire and Forest Health Authority.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has the direct charge and responsibility over all matters pertaining to forest fire services in the state. The forest fire-related duties of the DNR include enforcing all forest fire-related laws, investigating the cause of forest fires, and directing fire suppression efforts.

Additionally, in 2007 the Legislature designated the DNR as the state lead in developing a comprehensive forest health program for the state. As part of that designation, the DNR was directed to gather and disseminate forest health information, to coordinate forest health monitoring activities, and to coordinate with universities and other agencies to provide landowners with technical assistance regarding forest health.

### Fire and Forest Health in Washington.

A 2014 report from the DNR identified approximately 2.7 million acres of eastern Washington forestland in need of forest health treatment or disturbance, such as thinning or prescribed fire. Washington has experienced record-setting fires seasons in recent years, with approximately 380,000 acres burned in 2014 and over 1 million acres burned in 2015. Most recently, the 2016 fires season saw 294,000 acres burned in the state.

### **Summary of Bill:**

#### Forest Health and Treatment Framework.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must establish a forest health assessment and treatment framework. The framework has three components: assessment, treatment, and progress review and reporting. The purpose of the framework is to proactively and systematically address forest health issues facing the state. The DNR must utilize the framework to assess and treat fire prone lands each biennium, with a goal of assessing and treating one million acres of land by 2033. In developing and implementing the forest health assessment and treatment framework, the DNR must utilize and build on the forest health strategic planning initiated at the direction of the Legislature in 2016.

*Assessment*—Each biennium, the DNR must identify and assess two hundred thousand acres of fire prone lands and communities that are in need of forest health treatment, including both lands protected by the DNR and lands outside the DNR's fire protection responsibilities.

*Treatment*—Each biennium, the DNR must review previously completed assessments, and conduct as many identified forest health treatments as possible using appropriations provided for that purpose.

*Progress review and reporting*—By December 1st of each even-numbered year, the DNR must to submit to the Legislature and to the Office of Financial Management a request for funding to accomplish assessment and treatment work for the upcoming biennium, a prioritized list and brief summary of treatments planned to be conducted, and a list and brief summary of treatments carried out in the preceding biennium. The summary of treatments carried out in the preceding biennium must also include recommendations to address any barriers to implementing the forest health assessment and treatment framework.

*Forest health advisory committee*—The DNR must establish a Forest Health Advisory Committee to assist in developing and implementing the forest health assessment and treatment framework. The committee may include representation from a variety of forest health stakeholder groups, including forest landowners, wildland fire response organizations, conservation groups, and local communities. The committee may consult with federal agencies and with local, state, and tribal governments.

The DNR must implement the forest health assessment and treatment framework within appropriations specifically provided for that purpose.

As the DNR initiates implementation of the forest health assessment and treatment framework in the 2017-2019 biennium, the DNR may prioritize and treat lands included in its biennial budget request. During that same period, the DNR must also assess areas for prioritization and treatment in the 2019-2021 biennium.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available. New fiscal note requested on March 13, 2017.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.