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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5803**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2022 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Environment, Energy & Technology (originally sponsored by Senators Rolfes, Dhingra, Frockt, and Nobles)

AN ACT Relating to mitigating the risk of wildfires caused by an electric utility's equipment; amending RCW 76.04.780; adding new sections to chapter 43.21F RCW; adding a new section to chapter 80.28 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 19.29A RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) It is in the best interest of the state, our citizens, and our landscapes to identify the sources of wildland fires; identify and implement best practices to reduce the prevalence and intensity of those wildland fires; put those practices in place; and by putting those practices in place, reduce the risk of wildland fires and damage resulting from those fires.

(2) The legislature finds that electric utilities are partners with relevant state agencies, emergency responders, and public and private entities in identifying best practices to reduce the risk of and prevent wildland fires. Many electric utilities have developed and are implementing wildfire mitigation plans. The legislature further finds that electric utilities should adopt and implement wildfire mitigation plans, and that electric utilities should be informed by recognized best practices, as applicable to their geography, terrain, vegetation, and other characteristics specific in their service area, for reducing wildland fire risk and reducing damage from wildland fires as may be ignited by electric utility equipment.

(3) Therefore, the legislature intends to authorize the development of best practices guidelines and to require that electric utilities file their wildfire mitigation plans with the state in order to promote public transparency and to obtain review of the plans for inclusion of applicable best practices guidelines.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.21F RCW to read as follows:

(1) The energy emergency management office of the department shall contract with an independent consultant to recommend a format and a list of elements to be included in electric utility wildfire mitigation plans, including best practices guidance for each element. The energy emergency management office shall seek input from the emergency management division of the military department, the utilities and transportation commission, the department of natural resources, the utility wildland fire prevention advisory committee, electric utilities, the state fire marshal, the governor's office of Indian affairs, and the public. By April 1, 2023, the energy emergency management office shall make public a recommended format and elements for electric utility wildfire mitigation plans.

(2) The recommended elements must acknowledge that utilities serve areas that vary in topography, vegetation, population, and other characteristics, and the best practices guidelines within each element must recognize that a utility's adoption will be chosen to fit site-specific circumstances. The recommended elements must include, but are not limited to:

(a) Vegetation management along transmission and distribution lines and near associated equipment;

(b) Infrastructure inspection and maintenance repair activities, schedules, and recordkeeping;

(c) Modifications or upgrades to facilities and construction of new facilities to incorporate cost-effective measures to minimize fire risk;

(d) Preventative programs, including adoption of new technologies to harden utility infrastructure; and

(e) Operational procedures.

(3) The recommended format and set of elements developed by the energy emergency management office must be forwarded to the utilities and transportation commission, the department of natural resources, and all electric utilities in Washington state for a review period of three months prior to finalizing the format that will be adopted, to update their electric utility wildfire mitigation plan.

(4) For the purposes of this section, "electric utility" means an electrical company as defined in RCW 80.04.010 and a consumer-owned utility. A "consumer-owned utility" means a municipal electric utility, public utility district, irrigation district, cooperative, or mutual corporation association engaged in the business of distributing electricity to one or more electric customers in the state.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 80.28 RCW to read as follows:

By December 31, 2023, and every two years thereafter, each electrical company must review and revise, if appropriate, its wildfire mitigation plan. The plan should include a review of specific circumstances of that electrical company and incorporate as appropriate the recommendations developed pursuant to section 2 of this act. The electrical company must submit its plan to the commission and make the plan publicly available. Within six months of submission by the electrical company, the commission shall review the plan and confirm whether or not the plan contains the recommended elements. After the commission's review, the electrical company must provide a copy of the plan to the energy emergency management office along with a list and description of wildland fires within its customer service area over the previous two years as reported by the department of natural resources. The plan must be posted as specified in section 6 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 19.29A RCW to read as follows:

(1) By December 31, 2023, and every two years thereafter, each consumer-owned utility must review and revise, if appropriate, its wildfire mitigation plan. The plan should include a review of specific circumstances of that utility and incorporate as appropriate the recommendations developed pursuant to section 2 of this act. Each consumer-owned utility must submit their plans to the energy emergency management office for review, which must review the plans within six months and provide feedback and confirm the plans contain the recommended elements. The governing board of each consumer-owned utility shall review the plan and confirm whether or not the plan contains the recommended elements. After the governing board's review, the utility must provide a copy to the energy emergency management office, along with a list and description of wildland fires within its customer service area over the previous two years as reported by the energy emergency management office. The plan must be posted as specified in section 6 of this act.

(a) By December 31, 2022, each utility must provide a copy of their most recent wildfire risk mitigation plan to the energy emergency management office and they will be posted on a website.

(b) By December 31, 2023, the energy emergency management office will be available to provide technical assistance to consumer-owned utilities to include the best practices guidelines in their revision of wildfire risk mitigation plans.

(2) Two or more abutting utilities may codevelop a wildfire mitigation plan. Wildfire mitigation plans that are codeveloped by more than one utility may identify areas of common implementation, including communication protocols, that will assist in implementing the recommended elements pursuant to section 2 of this act.

(3) The department of commerce may assess a fee on each utility required to submit a plan under this section to recover the costs of the activities required or authorized by this section.

**Sec.**  RCW 76.04.780 and 2021 c 183 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The commissioner shall convene a utility wildland fire prevention advisory committee with electrical power distribution utilities by August 1, 2021. The duties of the advisory committee are to advise the department on issues including, but not limited to:

(a) Matters related to the ongoing implementation of the relevant recommendations of the electric utility wildland fire prevention task force established in chapter 77, Laws of 2019, and by August 1, 2021:

(i) Finalizing a model agreement for managing danger trees and other vegetation adjacent to utility rights-of-way on state uplands managed by the department;

(ii) Implementing recommendations of the task force related to communications and information exchanges between the department and utilities;

(iii) Implementing recommendations of the task force related to protocols and thresholds when implementing provisions of RCW 76.04.015; and

(iv) Implementing recommendations of the task force related to creating rosters of certified wildland fire investigator firms or persons and qualified utility operations personnel who may be called upon as appropriate;

(b) Providing a forum for electric utilities, the department, and other fire suppression organizations of the state to identify and develop solutions to issues of ((~~wildfire~~)) wildland fire prevention and risk mitigation specifically related to electric utilities transmission and distribution networks, identification of best management practices, electric utility infrastructure protection, and wildland fire suppression and response. In conducting these activities, the committee must cooperate with the energy emergency management office of the department of commerce to integrate the committee's activities with the recommendations for electric utility wildfire mitigation plans under section 2 of this act;

(c) Establishing joint public communications protocols among members of the advisory committee, and other entities, to inform residents of the state of potential critical fire weather events and the potential for power outages or disruptions;

(d) Providing comment to the wildland fire advisory committee established in RCW 76.04.179 through an annual presentation addressing policies and priorities of the utility wildland fire prevention advisory committee; and

(e) All other related issues deemed necessary by the commissioner.

(2) By August 1, 2021, the department must post on its website and update quarterly as necessary:

(a) Communication protocols and educational exchanges between the department and electric utilities;

(b) A voluntary model danger tree management agreement to utilities for their consideration for execution with the department;

(c) Protocols and thresholds that may be utilized when the department's investigation involves electric utility infrastructure or potential electric utility liability; and

(d) A roster of third-party certified wildland fire investigators and qualified utility personnel that may assist the department or utility in understanding and reducing risks and liabilities from wildland fire.

(3) Beginning July 1, 2022, and at the beginning of each subsequent biennium thereafter, the department must submit, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, a report describing the prior biennium proceedings of the advisory committee, including identification of recommended legislation, if any, necessary to prevent wildfires related to electric utilities. In addition, by December 31, 2022, the department must submit to the appropriate committees of the senate and house of representatives:

(a) A compilation and summary of existing fire risk mitigation plans maintained by electric utilities;

(b) An analysis of the costs and benefits of preparing and maintaining a comprehensive statewide wildland fire risk map that identifies relative risk classes, with detail at a level to assist property owners, local governments, utilities, wildland management agencies, and fire response agencies in taking actions to minimize wildland fire starts and resulting damage. The analysis must also address incorporating the boundaries of the wildland urban interface as mapped pursuant to RCW 19.27.031; and

(c) Recommendations for strengthening state agency coordination of wildland fire risk reduction, prevention, and suppression. In this work the utility wildland fire prevention advisory committee shall seek the views of the wildland fire advisory committee created under RCW 76.04.179, as well as the views of the department of commerce energy policy division and the emergency management division of the military department.

(4) The commissioner or the commissioner's designee must chair the advisory committee created in subsection (1) of this section and must appoint advisory committee members. The advisory committee must include a representative of the energy emergency management office of the department of commerce and a representative of the utilities and transportation commission. Advisory committee membership should also include:

(a) Entities providing retail electric service, including:

(i) One person representing each investor-owned utility;

(ii) Two persons representing municipal utilities;

(iii) Two persons representing public utility districts;

(iv) Two persons representing rural electric cooperatives;

(v) One person representing small forestland owners;

(vi) One person representing industrial forestland owners;

(b) Other persons with expertise in wildland fire risk reduction and prevention; and

(c) No more than two other persons designated by the commissioner.

(5) In addition to the advisory committee membership established in subsection (4) of this section, the commissioner shall designate two additional advisory committee members representing historically marginalized or underrepresented communities.

(6) The commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall convene the initial meeting of the advisory committee. The advisory committee chair must schedule and hold meetings on a regular basis in order to expeditiously accomplish the duties and make recommendations regarding the elements described in subsection (3) of this section.

(7) The members of the advisory committee, or individuals acting on their behalf, are immune from civil liability for official acts performed in the course of their duties specifically related to the advisory committee.

(8) Participation on the advisory committee created in subsection (1) of this section is strictly voluntary and without compensation.

(9) Any requirements in this section are subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for the specific purposes described.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.21F RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department's energy emergency management office must create a public website to host electric utility wildfire mitigation plans developed under sections 3 and 4 of this act.

(2) Nothing in this act may be construed to preclude electric utilities from continuing to develop and implement their wildfire mitigation plans. Electric utilities are encouraged to submit their 2022 plans to the department's energy emergency management office for inclusion on the website under subsection (1) of this section.

(3) For the purposes of this section, "electric utility" means an electrical company as defined in RCW 80.04.010 and a consumer-owned utility. A "consumer-owned utility" means a municipal electric utility, public utility district, irrigation district, cooperative, or mutual corporation association engaged in the business of distributing electricity to one or more electric customers in the state.

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