

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1168

As Reported by House Committee On:

Rural Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to long-term forest health and the reduction of wildfire dangers.

Brief Description: Concerning long-term forest health and the reduction of wildfire dangers.

Sponsors: Representatives Springer, Kretz, Fitzgibbon, Griffey, Riccelli, Lekanoff, Ramos, Callan, Harris-Talley, Dent and Klicker.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Rural Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/22/21, 1/29/21 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a mapping tool within the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework (Framework).
- Specifies ways in which the DNR must coordinate with various entities in developing and implementing the Framework.
- Directs the DNR to work with the Department of Commerce to implement initiatives to develop a forest health work force, and work with the Department of Corrections to expand existing programs to provide additional wildfire, forest health, and silvicultural capacity.
- Creates the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account (Account) to fund certain wildfire preparedness, prevention, and protection activities and requires the DNR to report every two years on how Account funds are used.
- Creates a Wildland Fire Aviation Support Plan to include recommendations related to the use of dedicated air resources.
- Creates a Small Forest Landowner Forest Health Program.

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

- Makes changes to the government-to-government coordination role of the Commissioner of Public Lands.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Chapman, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fitzgibbon, Klicker, Kloba, Kretz, Lekanoff, Morgan, Orcutt, Ramos and Springer.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Chandler, Ranking Minority Member.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives McEntire and Schmick.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

The Department of Natural Resources.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has 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. 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. Additionally, in 2019, the DNR developed the 10-year Wildland Fire Strategic Plan that establishes goals and identifies strategies for wildland fire preparedness, response, and recovery.

Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework (RCW 76.06.200).

In 2017 the DNR established the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework (Framework) at the direction of the Legislature. 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 use the Framework to assess and treat fire prone lands each biennium, with a goal of

assessing and treating 1 million acres of land by 2033. In developing and implementing the Framework, the DNR must use and build on the 20-year forest health strategic planning initiated at the direction of the Legislature in 2016.

Forest Health Advisory Committee.

In 2017 the DNR established the Forest Health Advisory Committee (Committee) to assist in developing and implementing the 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.

Wildland Fire Advisory Committee.

The Wildland Fire Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) was created in 2015. The Advisory Committee advises the Commissioner of Public Lands (Commissioner) on all matters related to wildland firefighting in the state. This includes developing strategies to enhance the safe and effective use of private and public wildland firefighting resources.

The Commissioner of Public Lands.

The Commissioner is designated as the state's lead for all forest health issues and is responsible for promoting government-to-government communications between the state and federal government on forest land management decisions. Each year, the Commissioner must provide a progress report to the Legislature on their coordination responsibility and any recommended statutory changes, policy issues, or funding needs.

Good Neighbor Agreements.

The United States Congress first authorized a Good Neighbor pilot program in 2000 between the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Colorado State Forest Service. Since that time, the Good Neighbor Authority Program has expanded to include the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in addition to the USFS, and to encompass all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Under Good Neighbor Authority agreements, state agencies are authorized to undertake a broad array of land management activities on USFS and BLM lands, including fuels management, and forest, range, and fisheries habitat restoration.

Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004.

The Tribal Forest Protection Act authorizes the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior to give special consideration to tribally proposed stewardship, contracting, or other projects on USFS or BLM land bordering or adjacent to Indian trust land to protect the Indian trust resources from fire, disease, or other threat coming off of that USFS or BLM land.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Natural Resources.

Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework.

Within the assessment element of the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must develop a mapping tool to identify small forest land owners (SFLOs) within wildfire risk areas. The DNR must use the mapping tool to evaluate and optimize forest health work to reduce wildfire risk in high risk areas and leverage funding and landowner assistance programs with the greatest impact for wildfire prevention, preparedness, and response.

The DNR must take additional actions when developing and implementing the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework. These actions include: (1) partnering with federally recognized tribes where possible to expand the use of the Tribal Forest Protection Act on certain federal lands; and (2) prioritizing forest health treatments nearby or adjacent to state lands when entering into good neighbor agreements, to increase the speed, efficiency, and impact on the landscape.

Small Forest Landowner Forest Health Program.

A Small Forest Landowner Forest Health Program is established that promotes the coordination of services to SFLOs and integrates existing landowner assistance programs to efficiently and effectively reach diverse SFLOs, distributes funding effectively to lower wildfire risk in high risk areas, increases education and outreach to small forest land owners, and identifies and removes barriers to technical assistance, funding, and forest health management planning. Priority areas for treatment under the Washington State Forest Action Plan, 10-year Forest Health Strategic Plan, and Wildland Fire Protection 10-year Strategic Plan may not prohibit technical support or stewardship plan support for SFLO lands outside the designated emphasis areas.

Workforce Development.

The DNR, jointly with the Department of Commerce (Commerce), and in consultation with centers for excellence, higher education, secondary education, and workforce development centers, must develop and implement initiatives to develop a forest health workforce. This includes developing a plan for tracking, maintaining, and publicly reporting on specific items related to development of workforce initiatives including: a working definition of the forest sector workforce; training recommendations; identification of gaps and barriers to a full forest sector workforce pool; and any recommendations for addressing barriers or other needs to develop a forest sector workforce.

The DNR and the Department of Corrections (DOC) must jointly expand existing programs

to provide additional wildfire, forest health, and silvicultural capacity, such as a post-release program to help formerly incarcerated individuals who have served on state fire response crews obtain employment in wildfire suppression and forest management.

The DNR must use existing programs, such as the Washington Conservation Corps, Washington Veterans Corps, or other similar programs to expand forest health workforce opportunities. Workforce development programs and policies should prioritize historically marginalized, underrepresented, rural, and low-income communities to the maximum extent possible.

Account and Reporting.

The Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account (Account) is created. Funds in the Account may be spent only after appropriation and used only to monitor, track, and implement certain wildfire preparedness, prevention, and protection purposes. Funds in the account may not be used for emergency fire costs or suppression costs. Appropriations for forest health activities must not be less than 25 percent of appropriations, and must not be less than 15 percent of appropriations for community resilience activities. The DNR may solicit recommendations on how to use funds in the account from the Forest Health Advisory Committee and the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee (Advisory Committees). The Advisory Committees must use environmental justice or equity focused tools to identify highly impacted communities when making recommendations for investments from the Account.

By December 1 of each odd-numbered year, the DNR must provide a report to the Governor and Legislature on: (1) the type, amount, and purpose of expenditures made from the Account by fiscal year; (2) the amount of unspent and unobligated funds in the Account, and recommendations for disbursement to local districts; (3) progress on the implementation of the Wildland Fire Protection 10-year Strategic Plan; and (4) progress on the implementation of the 20-year Forest Health Strategic Plan. The DNR must also include any recommendations for adjustments to how Account funds are disbursed.

Duties of the Commissioner of Public Lands.

The government-to-government coordination responsibilities of the Commissioner of Public Lands (Commissioner) extend to communication and coordination with Tribes. Duties of the Commissioner are added to require the Commissioner to meet regularly with regional leadership of the United States Forest Service (USFS) to coordinate on:

1. identifying strategies to improve the delivery and increase the pace and scale of forest health and resiliency treatments on USFS lands;
2. documenting resources needed to increase the capacity available to the USFS;
3. identifying planning and implementation support to the USFS through cooperative agreements and good neighbor agreements; and
4. maximizing the use of efficiencies for compliance with the National Environmental

Policy Act to increase the pace and scale of forest health treatments.

Instead of every year, the Commissioner must report to the Legislature every two years, and the report must include identification of any needed state or federal statutory changes, if deemed appropriate by the Commissioner, and an estimate of the acres of at-risk forests on each national forest and number of acres treated.

Wildland Fire Aviation Support Plan.

The DNR must develop and implement a Wildland Fire Aviation Support Plan as recommended by the Wildland Fire Protection 10-year Strategic Plan with the stated purpose to improve the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of the DNR's wildland fire aviation program. The plan must include recommendations for the addition of air assets, and evaluation of opportunities to increase air assets, costs and benefits to increase dedicated air resources, and strategies to upgrade the DNR's aircraft, as well as retardant loading and processing infrastructure at a port in Eastern Washington.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes the following changes to the underlying bill:

Intent.

Changes are made to the intent language, including distinguishing impacts between forestland and rangeland wildfires; acknowledging several factors impacting uncharacteristic wildfires, such as land use planning, climate changes, development patterns, and past fires suppression activities; and adding intent to create a small forest landowner forest health program and identifies additional statistics related to small forest landowner forestland.

Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account.

The requirement that no less than \$25 million is appropriated in the 2021-2023 biennium for forest health activities is removed. Instead, appropriations for activities funded by the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account (Account) shall be no less than 25 percent of the biennial appropriated funding. Appropriations for community resilience activities funded by the Account to be no less than 15 percent of the biennial appropriated funding.

Workforce Development.

Workforce development investments must prioritize historically marginalized, underrepresented, rural, and low-income communities to the maximum extent possible. Secondary education is added to the list of consulted entities for forest health workforce

initiatives. Forestry workforce grants may be provided to Washington state registered apprenticeship programs and recognized pre-apprenticeships, and contractors are included in wildfire suppression training programs.

Small Forest Landowner Forest Health Program.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must coordinate to develop the Small Forest Landowner Forest Health Program with additional parties such as state and federal agencies, colleges and universities, and consultants. The program must be consistent with the findings of "Washington's Small Forest Landowners in 2020, Status, Trends and Recommendations after 20 years of Forests & Fish, January 2021"; and priority areas set by DNR forest health and wildfire strategies must not prohibit stewardship plan or technical support for small forest landowners.

Wildland Fire Aviation Support Plan.

The DNR must develop and implement a Wildland Fire Aviation Support Plan as recommended by the Wildland Fire Protection 10-year Strategic Plan. The Wildland Fire Aviation Support Plan must include a variety of elements including recommendations for the addition of air assets to meet certain goals, and evaluation of opportunities to increase air assets, costs and benefits to increase dedicated air resources, and strategies to upgrade the DNR's aircraft, as well as retardant loading and processing infrastructure at a port in Eastern Washington.

The substitute bill also makes a variety of clarifying and technical changes.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on January 29, 2021.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Over the last few years it has become obvious that the state's communities and forests are at severe risk of wildfire, and something big needs to be done. People have lost homes, livestock, and lives, and the state cannot keep kicking the can down the road. Right now, this is a discussion about policy. Funding discussions will come later in the process. Adjustments made to address the COVID-19 pandemic made this fire season very different. Additionally, due to the active and long fire season in the west, firefighting crews were stretched very thin and Washington was largely on its own. Catastrophic wildfires do not need to be the new normal. The state needs to do more to prevent them. While 2020

was a bad fire season, it is not an outlier and without action the situation will get worse. This bill contains tools to help prepare for and prevent wildfire, and to develop a firefighting and forest health workforce.

At one point this summer there were five fires burning on the Colville Reservation. A mill was lost, many families lost everything, and the Colville Tribe is still in the process of assessing the damage. The state, tribes, and federal government must work together because wildfire does not have jurisdictional boundaries. There should be more programs like the Fire Adapted Communities Program, that help people understand how to prepare and protect their property from wildfire damage. In some parts of the state, community groups acted quickly to provide evacuation notices and assistance to displaced people in their native languages as well as English. Community resilience work in central Washington has been effective and helped engage the Latinx community. Kittitas County was one of the first counties in the state to have adopted the Wildland Urban Interface Code. Several women serve on the Roslyn Fire Department. The people in small communities do what they need to do to keep their communities safe. To have to evacuate on a moments notice is stressful to young kids and vulnerable communities. Marginalized communities are the most impacted during times of poor air quality. Many thought the Carlton Complex was a once-in-a-lifetime event, but large fires have become a new normal. The Okanogan County Long Term Recovery Group has helped thousands recover from fires not just in 2014, but also in subsequent years. Small communities do not have enough local funds to fight these fires on their own. The most successful forest health projects draw on two elements: (1) local and scientific knowledge of the landscape; and (2) community engagement. Even fires on the west side of the state, such as the Bonney Lake Fire in 2020, are becoming larger and more explosive. Due to the size and high threat, the whole local department was engaged and was not able to respond to other calls, including non-fire 911 calls. Pre-positioning additional firefighting equipment may give agencies a better chance to stop a fire and reduce the likelihood of lost homes and lives. High winds prevented aircraft from being used to fight the Malden fire. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has helped the Town of Malden replace one of the fire trucks that was lost. Thanks to mutual aid from multiple sources, no lives were lost during the fire in Malden, but were lost after the fire due to the stress. Houses can be replaced, but not memories.

The Washington State Labor Council is very excited about the workforce training elements of the bill, including the idea of a post-release program, as it is a way to create jobs in rural communities. There is capacity at several community colleges throughout the state to provide the necessary skills. Wildfire does not care about borders or budget cycles.

Proactive long-term investments are important. Workforce culture is an important factor in recruiting a diverse workforce.

The majority of common school trust land is forestland. Because forests are trust assets, it is important to protect those assets, and this bill does so. There should be amendments regarding the small forestland owner (SFLO) programs. There has been rapid change in land ownership, with many new SFLOs who are less experienced in forest management.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The Cattlemen's Association commends the attention to the devastation that fire brings to the farming and ranching community, and generally supports the spirit of the bill.

However, the cattlemen are concerned about the funding source, would like clarity on the environmental justice tools and how they would be used, and would like to see the ranching community represented on the Forest Health Advisory Committee. Elements of the bill align with the strategic planning goals of the Washington Prescribed Fire Council, but there are concerns that the bill could constrain work with other nongovernmental organizations.

The fact that the bill does not contain a funding source is concerning. Everyone in the state would stand to benefit from the outcomes of the bill, so revenue should be provided from a source that everyone pays into. The Department of Commerce is neutral on the bill because it is not in the Governor's budget. Workforce development is necessary to unlock opportunities, and maintaining forest health goes hand-in-hand with economic development on many levels.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Springer, prime sponsor; Justin Allegro, The Nature Conservancy; Mara Machulsky, City of Walla Walla; Logan Endres, Washington State School Directors' Association; Mark Doumit, Washington Forest Protection Association; Carlene Anders, Okanogan County Long Term Recovery; Elaine Oneil, Washington Farm Forestry Association; Bud Backer, East Pierce Fire and Rescue; Micaela Razo-Araguz and Isabel Araguz, Latino Community Fund; Hilary Franz, Department of Natural Resources; Kevin Murphy, Woodland Park Zoo; Heath Heikkila, American Forest Resource Council; Dan Harwood, Town of Malden; Larry Brown, Washington State Labor Council; Carrie Nyssen, American Lung Association; Rodney Cawston, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation; Laura Osiadacz, Kittitas County; Paul Jewell, Washington State Association of Counties; Giovanni Severino, Progreso: Latino Progress; Jasmine Minbashian, Methow Valley Citizens Council; Seamus Petrie, Washington Public Employees Association; and Alma Chacon, The Community for the Advancement of Family Education.

(Other) Chris Martin, Washington Prescribed Fire Council; Brian Hatfield, Department of Commerce; Ashley House, Washington Cattlemen's Association; and Kenton Brine, Northwest Insurance Council.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.