

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 1578

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Improving community preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience to wildland fire health and safety impacts in areas of increasing population density, including in the wildland urban interface.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Springer, Kretz, Reeves, Leavitt, Ramel, Lekanoff, Reed, Pollet and Kloba; by request of Department of Natural Resources).

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
House Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks
Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Background:

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. As the lead agency in developing a comprehensive forest health program for the state since 2007, the DNR gathers and disseminates forest health information, coordinates forest health monitoring activities, and coordinates with universities and other agencies to provide landowners with technical assistance regarding forest health. 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.

Smoke Monitoring.

The DNR coordinates with the departments of Ecology and Health, the United States Forest Service, and the National Weather Service on smoke monitoring. The Department of Ecology manages Washington's Air Monitoring Network, and tracks air quality through the

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use of air quality monitors throughout the state.

Emergency Management.

The Washington Military Department Emergency Management Division, under the direction of the Adjutant General, administers the state's comprehensive program of emergency management. In addition, each political subdivision of the state must establish or jointly create a local organization for carrying out emergency management functions in accordance with the State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.

Summary:

Decadal Wildfire Risk Assessments.

By July 1, 2027, the DNR must submit to the Legislature a risk assessment of areas at significant risk for wildfire for the decade between July 1, 2027, and July 1, 2037. The DNR must continue to provide decadal assessments to the Legislature every 10 years, with mid-decade interim reports due beginning July 1, 2032, and continuing every 10 years thereafter for at least 30 years. Each assessment must include analysis of climate influence on wildfire risk in the state and provide enough detail for landowners, the public, local governments, and federally recognized Indian tribes to develop strategies to address wildfire risk. Until July 1, 2025, wildfire risk assessments are intended to assist with improving community preparedness and response to wildland fires and are not intended for use in the development of any state or local government regulations. The DNR must coordinate with counties on an update to the wildland urban interface maps.

Evacuation Plan Development.

In areas identified as facing significant risk of wildfire pursuant to the DNR's decadal assessments, the DNR must consult with the State Emergency Management Division and the Washington State Patrol and cooperate with law enforcement, federally recognized Indian tribes, city and county emergency managers, and local fire protection districts to develop public safety evacuation strategies. The DNR must provide support to help incorporate evacuation strategies within existing regional and local emergency response plans. However, implementation of evacuation strategies remains under the authority of local law enforcement.

The DNR must lead a project to provide relevant emergency disaster evacuation plan messaging and information to the public at DNR managed recreation and outdoor access sites, placing particular emphasis on accessibility and accommodating the needs of public visitors.

Smoke Monitoring and Air Quality.

The DNR must expand its community resilience programming and associated supporting programs within the wildland urban interface in areas of Western Washington where the DNR determines that risk of wildfires and smoke exposure exist.

The DNR must incorporate smoke readiness into community resilience programming; coordinate with state, county, and federal agencies, and federally recognized Indian tribes to share information with communities affected by wildfire smoke; and participate in cross-agency emergency management planning and response efforts related to wildfire smoke plans. This includes:

- coordinating cross-agency to assess wildfire smoke risks and impacts;
- working cross-agency to address smoke risk to transportation safety, and firefighter exposure to smoke; and
- conducting community engagement and outreach related to wildfire smoke risks and impacts, particularly in regions of the state that experience disproportionately high levels of air contaminants and pollutants.

The DNR must leverage community resilience programming to ensure residents and community organizations are provided information about services and programs to improve air quality in the home, including connecting residents with local contracted weatherization agencies.

Post-Wildfire Debris Flow Program.

The DNR must implement a Post-Wildfire Debris Flow Program (Program) by July 1, 2028. As a part of the Program, the DNR must:

- identify areas prone to hazards from post-wildfire debris flows;
- assess burned areas to determine potential for increases in post-wildfire debris flow hazards;
- improve modeling to determine triggers for post-wildfire debris flow early warning for at-risk communities and infrastructure; and
- communicate to emergency managers, local governments, stakeholder, and the public for preparedness and response.

By December 30, 2027, the DNR must have established a structure for a state-sponsored burned area emergency stabilization and response team, in consultation with county emergency managers, the Military Department, and the Washington Conservation Commission. Burned area emergency stabilization and response teams determine the need for emergency postfire treatments for public safety and resource protection. The DNR must provide capacity-building to local communities to establish local teams. In establishing the structure, the DNR must also make recommendations regarding:

- the appropriate number of teams needed;
- the funding necessary to support team deployments; and
- the implementation of hazard mitigation.

Votes on Final Passage:

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| House | 95 | 0 | |
| Senate | 49 | 0 | (Senate amended) |
| House | 96 | 0 | (House concurred) |

Effective: July 23, 2023