
SENATE BILL 5039

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By Senators Rolfes, Conway, Gildon, Hasegawa, Keiser, Kuderer, Nguyen, Nobles, and Wellman

Prefiled 12/12/22. Read first time 01/09/23. Referred to Committee on Environment, Energy & Technology.

1 AN ACT Relating to mitigating the risk of wildfires through
2 electric utility planning and identification of best management
3 practices appropriate to each electric utility's circumstances;
4 amending RCW 76.04.780; adding a new section to chapter 43.21F RCW;
5 adding a new section to chapter 80.28 RCW; adding a new section to
6 chapter 19.29A RCW; and creating a new section.

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

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) It is in the best interest of the
9 state, our citizens, and our natural resources to identify the
10 sources of wildland fires; identify and implement best practices to
11 reduce the prevalence and intensity of those wildland fires; put
12 those practices in place; and by putting those practices in place,
13 reduce the risk of wildland fires and damage and losses resulting
14 from those fires.

15 (2) The legislature finds that electric utilities are partners
16 with relevant state agencies, emergency responders, and public and
17 private entities in identifying best practices to reduce the risk of
18 and prevent wildland fires. Many electric utilities have developed
19 and are implementing wildfire mitigation plans. The legislature
20 further finds that electric utilities should adopt and implement
21 wildfire mitigation plans, and that electric utilities should be

1 informed by recognized best practices, as applicable to their
2 geography, terrain, vegetation, and other characteristics specific in
3 their service area, for reducing wildland fire risk and reducing
4 damage from wildland fires as may be ignited by electric utility
5 equipment.

6 (3) Therefore, the legislature intends to authorize the
7 identification of best practices guidelines and to require that
8 electric utilities provide their wildfire mitigation plans to the
9 state in order to promote public transparency.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.21F
11 RCW to read as follows:

12 (1) The office shall contract with an independent consultant with
13 experience in developing electric utility wildfire mitigation plans
14 to recommend a plan format and identify and recommend a list of
15 actions to be included in electric utility wildfire mitigation plans,
16 including best practices guidance that may apply to each action as
17 appropriate. In identifying the plan format and list of actions, the
18 office shall seek input from the utilities and transportation
19 commission, the department of natural resources, the utility wildland
20 fire prevention advisory committee, electric utilities, the state
21 fire marshal, the governor's office of Indian affairs, and the
22 public. By April 1, 2024, the office shall make public a recommended
23 format and list of actions for electric utility wildfire mitigation
24 plans. The office may update these guidelines annually if needed, but
25 not more than once in each year.

26 (2) The recommended actions must acknowledge that utilities serve
27 areas that vary in topography, vegetation, population, and other
28 characteristics, and that best practices guidelines within each
29 action must recognize that a utility's wildfire mitigation measures
30 will be designed to fit site-specific circumstances. The recommended
31 actions must include, but are not limited to:

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

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

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

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

3 (e) Operational procedures;

4 (f) Identification of appropriate widths for vegetation
5 management and rights-of-way, including the consideration of fire-
6 resistant vegetation alternatives;

7 (g) Protocols for disabling reclosers and deenergizing portions
8 of the electric system along with associated communication plans for
9 impacted parties and the public, including highly impacted
10 communities as defined in RCW 19.405.020, vulnerable populations as
11 defined in RCW 19.405.020, and persons reliant on electricity to
12 maintain necessary life functions;

13 (i) Each electric utility's protocols must include a description
14 of how the utility will mitigate the public safety impacts of
15 disabling reclosers and deenergizing portions of the electric system
16 that consider the impacts on all of the following: Critical first
17 responders, local and tribal governments, health and communication
18 infrastructure, highly impacted communities as defined in RCW
19 19.405.020, vulnerable populations as defined in RCW 19.405.020, and
20 persons reliant on electricity to maintain necessary life functions;

21 (ii) Decisions about whether or not to disable reclosers and
22 deenergize electric lines are reserved to the electric utility; and

23 (h) Public and interested parties' engagement and communication
24 plans addressing wildfire safety and risk mitigation.

25 (3) The recommended format and list of actions identified by the
26 office must be forwarded to the utilities and transportation
27 commission, the department of natural resources, and all electric
28 utilities in Washington state for a review period of no less than
29 three months prior to finalizing the format and list of actions that
30 utilities will use to adopt or update their electric utility wildfire
31 mitigation plan.

32 (4) The office will provide technical assistance to consumer-
33 owned utilities and investor-owned utilities to support inclusion of
34 these guidelines in the revision of their plans.

35 (5) The office must create a public website to host electric
36 utility wildfire mitigation plans as described under sections 3 and 4
37 of this act.

38 (6) By December 31, 2024, the office must submit to the
39 appropriate committees of the senate and house of representatives a

1 compilation and summary of existing wildfire mitigation plans
2 maintained by electric utilities.

3 (7) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this
4 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

5 (a) "Consumer-owned utility" means a municipal electric utility
6 formed under Title 35 RCW, a public utility district formed under
7 Title 54 RCW, an irrigation district formed under chapter 87.03 RCW,
8 a cooperative formed under chapter 23.86 RCW, or a mutual corporation
9 or association formed under chapter 24.06 RCW, that is engaged in the
10 business of distributing electricity to more than one retail electric
11 customer in the state.

12 (b) "Electric utility" or "electrical company" means a consumer-
13 owned utility or an investor-owned utility as defined in this
14 section.

15 (c) "Investor-owned utility" means a corporation owned by
16 investors that meets the definition of "corporation" as defined in
17 RCW 80.04.010 and is engaged in distributing electricity to more than
18 one retail electric customer in the state.

19 (d) "Office" means the energy resilience and emergency management
20 office of the department.

21 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 80.28
22 RCW to read as follows:

23 (1) By October 31, 2024, and every three years thereafter, each
24 electrical company must review and revise, if appropriate, its
25 wildfire mitigation plan. The plan should include a review of
26 specific circumstances of that electrical company and incorporate as
27 appropriate the identified actions pursuant to section 2 of this act.
28 The electrical company must submit its plan to the commission and
29 make the plan publicly available.

30 (a) Within six months of submission by the electrical company,
31 the commission shall review the plan and confirm whether or not the
32 plan contains the recommended actions. In reviewing the plan, the
33 commission must consult with the energy resilience and emergency
34 management office of the department of commerce. The commission's
35 review of an electrical company's wildfire mitigation plan does not
36 relieve an electrical company from proactively managing wildfire
37 risk, including by monitoring emerging practices and technologies,
38 and mitigating and responding to wildfires. The commission is not
39 liable for an electrical company's performance implementing its

1 wildfire mitigation plan. The commission's review of an electrical
2 company's wildfire mitigation plan and any recommendations associated
3 with the review do not constitute a reasonableness review or approval
4 of recovery of any measure, investment, cost, or other component of
5 the plan.

6 (b) After the commission's review, the electrical company must
7 provide a copy of the plan to the energy resilience and emergency
8 management office of the department of commerce along with a list and
9 description of wildland fires within its customer service area over
10 the previous two years as reported by the department of natural
11 resources. The plan must be posted as specified in section 2 of this
12 act. Electrical companies are encouraged to submit any 2023 wildfire
13 mitigation plans to the office prior to the revision date required in
14 this subsection.

15 (2) Nothing in this act may be construed to relieve an electrical
16 company from proactively managing wildfire risk, including by
17 monitoring emergency practices and technologies, or mitigating and
18 responding to wildland fires.

19 (3) For the purposes of this section, "electrical company" means
20 a company owned by investors that meets the definition of
21 "corporation" in RCW 80.04.010 and is engaged in distributing
22 electricity to more than one retail electric customer in the state.

23 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 19.29A
24 RCW to read as follows:

25 (1) By October 31, 2024, and every three years thereafter, each
26 consumer-owned utility must review and revise, if appropriate, its
27 wildfire mitigation plan. The plan should include a review of
28 specific circumstances of that utility and incorporate as appropriate
29 the identified actions pursuant to section 2 of this act.

30 (a) The governing board of each consumer-owned utility shall
31 review the plan and confirm whether the plan contains the recommended
32 actions. Local fire districts must be provided the opportunity to
33 review and provide feedback during this period. After the governing
34 board's review, the utility must provide a copy to the energy
35 resilience and emergency management office of the department of
36 commerce, along with a list and description of wildland fires within
37 its customer service area over the previous two years as reported by
38 the department of natural resources. The energy resilience and
39 emergency management office of the department of commerce must review

1 the plans and provide feedback within six months for consideration
2 for inclusion in the next plan revision. The plan must be posted as
3 specified in section 2 of this act.

4 (b) The energy resilience and emergency management office of the
5 department of commerce must review the submitted plans and provide
6 feedback within six months for consideration for inclusion in the
7 plan revision. The energy resilience and emergency management office
8 of the department of commerce is not liable for a consumer-owned
9 utility's implementation of its wildfire mitigation plan. The energy
10 resilience and emergency management office of the department of
11 commerce's review of the consumer-owned utility's plan and any
12 recommendations associated with the review do not constitute a
13 reasonableness review or approval of recovery of any measure,
14 investment, cost, or other component of the plan.

15 (c) Consumer-owned utilities are encouraged to submit any 2023
16 wildfire mitigation plans to the energy resilience and emergency
17 management office of the department of commerce prior to the revision
18 date required in this subsection.

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

25 (3) Nothing in this section prohibits a utility from reviewing or
26 updating its wildfire mitigation plan more often than once a year or
27 requires that the utility submit their plan beyond the requirements
28 of subsection (1) of this section.

29 (4) Nothing in this act may be construed to relieve an electric
30 utility from proactively managing wildfire risk, including by
31 monitoring emerging practices and technologies, and mitigating and
32 responding to wildfires.

33 **Sec. 5.** RCW 76.04.780 and 2021 c 183 s 1 are each amended to
34 read as follows:

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

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

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

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

10 (iii) Implementing recommendations of the task force related to
11 protocols and thresholds when implementing provisions of RCW
12 76.04.015; and

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

17 (b) Providing a forum for electric utilities, the department, and
18 other fire suppression organizations of the state to identify and
19 develop solutions to issues of (~~wildfire~~) wildland fire prevention
20 and risk mitigation specifically related to electric utilities
21 transmission and distribution networks, identification of best
22 management practices, electric utility infrastructure protection, and
23 wildland fire suppression and response;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 (3) Beginning July 1, 2022, and at the beginning of each
9 subsequent biennium thereafter, the department must submit, in
10 compliance with RCW 43.01.036, a report describing the prior biennium
11 proceedings of the advisory committee, including identification of
12 recommended legislation, if any, necessary to prevent wildfires
13 related to electric utilities. In addition, by December 31, 2023, the
14 department must submit to the appropriate committees of the senate
15 and house of representatives:

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

25 (b) Recommendations for strengthening state agency coordination
26 of wildland fire risk reduction, prevention, and suppression. In this
27 work the utility wildland fire prevention advisory committee shall
28 seek the views of the wildland fire advisory committee created under
29 RCW 76.04.179, as well as the views of the energy resilience and
30 emergency management office of the department of commerce.

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

- 38 (a) Entities providing retail electric service, including:
39 (i) One person representing each investor-owned utility;
40 (ii) Two persons representing municipal utilities;

1 (iii) Two persons representing public utility districts;
2 (iv) Two persons representing rural electric cooperatives;
3 (v) One person representing small forestland owners;
4 (vi) One person representing industrial forestland owners;
5 (b) Other persons with expertise in wildland fire risk reduction
6 and prevention; and
7 (c) No more than two other persons designated by the
8 commissioner.

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

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

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

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

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

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