

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SSB 5546

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Synopsis as Enacted

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).

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

Background: Department of Natural Resources' Fire and Forest Health Authority. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has direct charge of and supervision over all matters pertaining to the forest fire service of the state, specifically including the work of suppressing forest fires. Additionally, in 2007 the Legislature designated the DNR as the state lead in developing a comprehensive forest health program for the state and created a tiered advisory and regulatory system to address forest health issues.

Fire and Forest Health in Washington. A 2014 report from 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: Establishes a Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework. DNR must develop a forest health assessment and treatment framework designed to address the forest health issues facing the state. A specific goal of the framework is to assess and treat one million acres by 2033. For each biennium, the framework must include:

- a plan to identify and assess 200,000 acres of fire-prone lands and communities in need of treatment, such as through prescribed fire or mechanical treatment—the scope of the assessment includes state-protected lands as well as other lands that pose a high risk to lands protected by DNR;
- the prioritization of areas assessed in the previous biennium and treatment of as many of those acres as possible with the available funding; and

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- a biennial progress review and reporting process that includes providing funding requests, planned treatments, and reporting completed treatments and barriers to framework implementation to the Legislature and Office of Financial Management.

Provides Directives for Framework Implementation. In developing and implementing the framework, DNR must:

- build on forest health strategic planning efforts initiated through funding in 2016;
- establish a forest health advisory committee to assist the agency; and
- operate the framework within appropriations specifically provided for that purpose.

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

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	49	0
House	98	0

Effective: July 23, 2017