

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5393

As of February 10, 1997

Title: An act relating to assessments for forest fire protection.

Brief Description: Assessing the cost of forest fire protection.

Sponsors: Senators West and Spanel; by request of Office of Financial Management.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/11/97.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Cathy Baker (786-7708)

Background: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides fire protection for much of the nonfederal forest land in Washington. Landowners receiving DNR fire protection pay an annual assessment of \$14.50 per year for the first 50 acres and 22 cents per acre for each acre exceeding 50 acres. These fees are set in statute.

The forest fire protection assessments are collected by county assessors at the same time and in the same manner that property taxes are collected. Fifty cents per parcel is retained by the county to defray the costs of billing and collecting the assessment.

Landowners who have paid the assessment on two or more parcels may apply to the department for a refund of a portion of the assessment provided that the parcels are each smaller than 50 acres and are located within the same county.

Assessment revenue supports approximately 80 percent of the DNR's fire protection program budget in the current biennium. The fire protection program is responsible for hiring and training firefighting crews, maintaining firefighting equipment, forecasting fire weather, administering fire prevention and education programs, and developing agreements with local, state and federal agencies.

The actual costs of responding to fires are budgeted separately through the fire suppression program. Most fire suppression costs are paid out of the state general fund.

Summary of Bill: The forest fire protection assessment is increased from \$14.50 to \$16.75 for the first 50 acres, and from 22 cents to 25 cents on each acre exceeding 50 acres.

A corresponding increase is provided in the amount that may be refunded to eligible landowners.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.