

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5199

As of January 25, 2017

Title: An act relating to fire suppression volunteers.

Brief Description: Concerning fire suppression volunteers.

Sponsors: Senators Becker, Warnick, Fain, Bailey and Brown.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/24/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to maintain a list of qualified fire suppression volunteers and provide equipment and training for these volunteers.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Kelsey Morfitt (786-7407)

Background: DNR. The Legislature designated DNR as the state's manager for forest fire prevention and suppression activities. In this role, DNR must lead and supervise all matters pertaining to the state's forest fire service.

Fire Suppression Volunteers. Fire crew volunteers must possess adequate training and qualifications. This requires a red card, which is an on-scene incident qualification, or a blue card, which is a letter documenting the firefighter's qualifications such as fitness exam results or other safety trainings completed. DNR trains volunteers on-site during a wildfire and works with local agencies to help provide equipment to volunteers. The public may volunteer with local fire departments.

Summary of Bill: Fire Suppression Volunteer List. DNR must create and maintain a list of qualified fire suppression volunteers. Local emergency authorities must have access to this list. DNR must also cooperate with federal wildfire agencies to use local resources efficiently. Volunteers means qualified individuals performing fire suppression activities for DNR without compensation.

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

Training for Fire Suppression Volunteers. DNR must provide free training to volunteers. DNR may still conduct on-site training when a wildfire occurs. DNR cannot be sued for adverse impacts from training unless DNR is grossly negligent or conducts willful or wanton misconduct.

Equipment for Fire Suppression Volunteers. DNR must maintain an inventory list and provide and inspect equipment for volunteers. Furthermore, DNR must offer to reimburse volunteers for equipment purchased for volunteer work. If a volunteer accepts reimbursement for the equipment, the volunteer must relinquish the purchased equipment to DNR after volunteering.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill allows volunteer firefighters to complete volunteer work with equipment provided by DNR. If DNR reimburses a volunteer for equipment, the volunteer must turn the equipment back in to DNR after volunteering.

CON: The way this bill is written compromises firefighter safety. Much of the work is already contracted out and picking up new volunteers the day of a fire poses safety risks because training backgrounds would vary. Volunteers may work with local authorities.

OTHER: There are firefighter safety concerns due to the lack of uniform, complex training. Those wanting to volunteer should join local fire districts. DNR has qualified contracted resources. Firefighters do not want training standards to be lowered.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Randi Becker, Prime Sponsor.

CON: Andrew Schaffran, WA. St. Fire Fighters Association.

OTHER: Loren Torgerson, Dept. Natural Resources / Wildfire Policy Advisor; Seamus Petrie, Washington Public Employees Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.