

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESHB 1498

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Concerning aviation assurance funding in response to wildland fires.

Sponsors: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Dye, Dent, Christian, Schmidt, Eslick, Graham and Volz).

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:

Local Wildland Fire Liaison.

The Commissioner of Public Lands (Commissioner) must appoint a local wildland fire liaison to represent the interests and concerns of landowners and the general public during any Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fire suppression activities. The role of the local wildland fire liaison is, among other things, to advise the Commissioner on landowner concerns and the availability of local fire suppression assets.

State Fire Services Mobilization.

During an emergency, when a local jurisdiction needs assistance beyond the capabilities of local resources and mutual aid agreements, a request may be made for a state fire service mobilization (Mobilization). Mobilization means that all risk resources regularly provided by fire departments, fire districts, and regional fire protection service authorities beyond those available through existing agreements will be requested; and when available, sent in response to an emergency or disaster situation that has exceeded the capabilities of available local resources. During a large-scale emergency, Mobilization includes the redistribution of regional or statewide risk resources to either direct emergency incident assignments or to assignments in communities where resources are needed.

Summary:

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

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must prepare and submit an appendix on aviation usage by local fire departments for initial attack as a part of its annual wildfire report to the standing committees of the Legislature with jurisdiction over wildland firefighting. The DNR must submit the report by December 1 of each year. The report must address, at a minimum, the following topics:

- the dollar value of funding utilized by local fire departments for initial attack aviation during the year;
- the specific local fire departments that utilized this funding during the year;
- the wildland fires on which suppression funding was utilized to provide local and tribal fire departments initial attack aviation resources during the year, including names, locations, and sizes of fires, and amount of funding utilized on each of the fires; and
- a review of lessons learned related to aviation use by local fire departments for initial attack based on the preceding fire season, along with recommendations for future improvements to the wildland fire response process based on the lessons learned.

The DNR must consult with the State Fire Defense Committee, fire service representatives, and the State Fire Marshal's Office annually to review aviation program performance and determine aviation needs for the following fire year.

Subject to the availability of funding, the DNR must use suppression funding to assist local fire departments with aerial fire response capabilities during the critical initial attack phase of fighting a wildland fire.

The DNR must use suppression funding to assist local fire departments with initial attacks that meet the following requirements:

- the local fire department must have entered into a response agreement with the DNR;
- the local fire department must provide documentation to the DNR that personnel have received training regarding the use of aviation assets in initial attack and criteria to use for determining when to call for aviation assets;
- the aviation assets used in initial attack must come from a list of private contractors approved by the DNR on exclusive use or call-when-needed agreements based upon the annual review of aviation response and aviation needs;
- local fire departments must make direct requests to the appropriate coordination center, including the Central Washington Interagency Coordination Center, the Northeast Washington Interagency Coordination Center, the Blue Mountain Interagency Coordination Center, or the DNR Coordination Center, in order to ensure the safe coordination of all aircraft; and
- upon receiving a request for aviation assets, the coordinating agency must notify the director of fire protection, or the director's designee, to ensure operational knowledge of a potential future request to invoke the fire service mobilization plan.

The DNR must convene a work group composed of wildfire aviation subject matter experts; fire service representatives from the Washington Fire Chiefs Association, the Washington

State Council of Firefighters, the Washington State Fire Fighters' Association, and the Washington Fire Commissioners Association; wildland fire management staff, and other partners to evaluate the costs and benefits of a state certification program for aircraft and pilots used in wildfire suppression. The DNR must include the findings of the work group in a report to be submitted to the Wildfire Advisory Committee and appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2025.

The act expires July 1, 2027.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	97	0	
Senate	49	0	(Senate amended)
House	96	0	(House concurred)

Effective: July 23, 2023