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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1971**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2024 Regular Session**

**By** House Agriculture and Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Dent, Griffey, Chapman, Dye, and Sandlin)

READ FIRST TIME 01/31/24.

1 AN ACT Relating to a rangeland fire protection association pilot  
2 project; adding new sections to chapter 76.04 RCW; creating a new  
3 section; and providing expiration dates.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that ranchers,  
6 farmers, rural property owners, and others who live and work in the  
7 rural areas of our state that are most susceptible to the threat of  
8 wildfire are uniquely situated, by virtue of their knowledge of the  
9 land and proximity to wildfires, to provide critical initial attack  
10 firefighting capabilities.

11 (2) Rangeland fire protection associations have the potential to  
12 offer a coordinated approach to wildland fire suppression by taking  
13 advantage of the quick initial attack capabilities of those already  
14 out on the land, addressing the desire of those living and working in  
15 wildland areas to be active participants in protecting the places  
16 where they live and work, ensuring that all those engaged in the  
17 wildland firefighting effort have the necessary training, equipment,  
18 and communications capabilities, and supporting the state's efforts  
19 to provide a complete, coordinated approach to wildland fire  
20 prevention, detection, and suppression.

1 (3) Accordingly, it is the intent of the legislature that the  
2 department of natural resources implement a five-year pilot project  
3 in eastern Washington in order to assess the effectiveness of  
4 rangeland fire protection associations in Washington.

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 76.04  
6 RCW to read as follows:

7 (1) The department shall conduct a rangeland fire protection  
8 association pilot project in order to better assess the measures  
9 needed to ensure the safe and effective operation of rangeland fire  
10 protection associations. The pilot project must be conducted in the  
11 locations specified in subsection (4) of this section. The pilot  
12 project must be operational by the beginning of calendar year 2025  
13 and must conclude at the end of calendar year 2028.

14 (2) The operations of rangeland fire protection associations must  
15 comply with the requirements established in sections 3 through 5 of  
16 this act. In addition, in implementing this pilot project, the  
17 department:

18 (a) Shall develop and publish recommendations concerning the  
19 formation, management, operation, and training of members of a  
20 rangeland fire protection association, including the determination of  
21 the safety, administrative, and training requirements that must be  
22 met; and

23 (b) Shall, prior to entering into an agreement with a rangeland  
24 fire protection association, and at least annually thereafter, review  
25 and inspect the rangeland fire protection association for the  
26 following:

27 (i) The governance and management structure of the rangeland fire  
28 protection association;

29 (ii) The adequacy of liability insurance; and

30 (iii) The training of all rangeland fire protection association  
31 personnel.

32 (3) A rangeland fire protection association operating as part of  
33 the pilot project authorized by this act may enter into agreements  
34 with fire protection service agencies for the detection, prevention,  
35 or suppression of fires. Subject to the approval of the department,  
36 the fire protection service agency may negotiate the form and content  
37 of the agreement.

38 (4) The department shall conduct the rangeland fire protection  
39 association pilot project east of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

1 (5) The department shall submit a report on the pilot project as  
2 an appendix to the department's annual report to the appropriate  
3 committees of the legislature by December 1st of each year. The  
4 report must address, at a minimum, the following elements:

5 (a) Safety;

6 (b) Training;

7 (c) Funding;

8 (d) Governance;

9 (e) Operations and effectiveness; and

10 (f) Communication and coordination with other fire protection  
11 service agencies.

12 (6) This section expires June 30, 2029.

13 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 76.04  
14 RCW to read as follows:

15 (1) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout sections  
16 2 through 5 of this act unless the context clearly requires  
17 otherwise.

18 (a) "Member" means an individual who has been appointed by a  
19 rangeland fire protection association to perform fire detection,  
20 prevention, and suppression services.

21 (b) "Rangeland fire protection association" means a nonprofit  
22 corporation or nonprofit unincorporated association that has entered  
23 into an agreement for the detection, prevention, or suppression of  
24 wildfires with any agency of the state of Washington or any fire  
25 protection service agency.

26 (2) This section applies only to rangeland fire protection  
27 associations operating pursuant to the pilot project established in  
28 section 2 of this act. No person may form or participate in a  
29 rangeland fire protection association except pursuant to the pilot  
30 project established in section 2 of this act.

31 (3) This section expires June 30, 2029.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 76.04  
33 RCW to read as follows:

34 (1) Persons engaged in the detection, prevention, and suppression  
35 of wildfires outside of the boundaries of a local, regional, or state  
36 fire protection service agency may act together for the mutual  
37 benefit of the members and their communities in nonprofit  
38 associations or unincorporated associations. Such an association must

1 include in its name "rangeland fire protection association." Such an  
2 association is authorized to enter into agreements with fire  
3 protection service agencies, as defined in RCW 52.12.160, for the  
4 detection, prevention, or suppression of wildfires.

5 (2) The rangeland fire protection association shall identify the  
6 physical boundaries within which it will provide detection,  
7 prevention, and suppression of wildfire services and resources. The  
8 service boundaries of a rangeland fire protection association may be  
9 adjacent to department protected lands, as defined in RCW 76.04.005.  
10 The operations of a rangeland fire protection association may, on an  
11 occasional and temporary basis, extend beyond its boundaries and onto  
12 department protected lands for the purpose of attempting to  
13 extinguish or control a wildland fire consistent with RCW 76.04.770.

14 (3) The rangeland fire protection association must have liability  
15 insurance.

16 (4) The provisions of this chapter do not require a person or a  
17 person's agent to be a member of a rangeland fire protection  
18 association in order to suppress a fire occurring on the person's  
19 property or fires that pose a threat to the person's property.

20 (5) This section applies only to rangeland fire protection  
21 associations operating pursuant to the pilot project established in  
22 section 2 of this act. No person may form or participate in a  
23 rangeland fire protection association except pursuant to the pilot  
24 project established in section 2 of this act.

25 (6) This section expires June 30, 2029.

26 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** A new section is added to chapter 76.04  
27 RCW to read as follows:

28 (1) Rangeland fire protection association members must:

29 (a) Be at least 18 years old;

30 (b) During all fire suppression activities, use and maintain  
31 personal protective equipment that meets published standards of the  
32 Washington state department of natural resources or United States  
33 bureau of land management as appropriate during wildfire suppression  
34 activities; and

35 (c) Have achieved a basic level of wildland fire training. The  
36 recommended training for a rangeland fire protection association  
37 member participating in wildland fire suppression is training that  
38 achieves the level of wildland firefighter 2, as specified in the  
39 published standards of the national wildfire coordinating group.

1           (2) The provisions of RCW 76.04.770 apply to members of a  
2 rangeland fire protection association.

3           (3) This section applies only to rangeland fire protection  
4 associations operating pursuant to the pilot project established in  
5 section 2 of this act. No person may form or participate in a  
6 rangeland fire protection association except pursuant to the pilot  
7 project established in section 2 of this act.

8           (4) This section expires June 30, 2029.

--- **END** ---