
HOUSE BILL 1971

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Representatives Dent, Griffey, Chapman, Dye, and Sandlin

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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 three locations in eastern Washington in order to assess the
4 effectiveness of rangeland fire protection associations in
5 Washington.

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

8 (1) The department shall conduct a rangeland fire protection
9 association pilot project in order to better assess the measures
10 needed to ensure the safe and effective operation of rangeland fire
11 protection associations. The pilot project must be conducted in the
12 locations specified in subsection (4) of this section. The pilot
13 project must be operational by the beginning of the calendar year
14 2025 fire season and must conclude at the end of the calendar year
15 2028 fire season.

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

20 (a) May develop and publish recommendations concerning the
21 formation, management, operation, and training of members of a
22 rangeland fire protection association;

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

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

28 (ii) The adequacy of liability insurance; and

29 (iii) The training of all rangeland fire protection association
30 personnel; and

31 (c) May enter into agreements with fire protection districts and
32 regional fire protection service authorities within the pilot project
33 area described in subsection (4) of this section, in order to
34 implement a rangeland fire protection firefighting program utilizing
35 volunteer firefighters.

36 (3) A rangeland fire protection association operating as part of
37 the pilot project authorized by this act may enter into agreements
38 with fire protection service agencies for the detection, prevention,
39 or suppression of fires. Subject to the approval of the department,

1 the fire protection service agency may negotiate the form and content
2 of the agreement, and may determine the safety, administrative, and
3 training requirements that must be met in order for the rangeland
4 fire protection association to enter into an agreement.

5 (4) The department shall conduct the rangeland fire protection
6 association pilot project in three separate areas east of the crest
7 of the Cascade mountains.

8 (5) The department shall submit a report on the pilot project to
9 the appropriate committees of the legislature at the conclusion of
10 the pilot project. The report is due by November 15, 2028. The report
11 must address, at a minimum, the following elements:

12 (a) Safety;

13 (b) Training;

14 (c) Funding;

15 (d) Governance;

16 (e) Operations and effectiveness; and

17 (f) Communication and coordination with other fire protection
18 service agencies.

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

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

22 (1) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout sections
23 2 through 5 of this act unless the context clearly requires
24 otherwise.

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

28 (b) "Rangeland fire protection association" means a nonprofit
29 corporation or nonprofit unincorporated association that has entered
30 into an agreement for the detection, prevention, or suppression of
31 wildfires with any agency of the state of Washington or any fire
32 protection service agency.

33 (2) This section applies only to rangeland fire protection
34 associations operating pursuant to the pilot project established in
35 section 2 of this act. No person may form or participate in a
36 rangeland fire protection association except pursuant to the pilot
37 project established in section 2 of this act.

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

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

3 (1) Persons engaged in the detection, prevention, and suppression
4 of wildfires outside of the boundaries of a local, regional, or state
5 fire protection service agency may act together for the mutual
6 benefit of the members and their communities in nonprofit
7 associations or unincorporated associations. Such an association must
8 include in its name "rangeland fire protection association." Such an
9 association is authorized to enter into agreements with fire
10 protection service agencies, as defined in RCW 52.12.160, for the
11 detection, prevention, or suppression of wildfires.

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

21 (3) The rangeland fire protection association must have liability
22 insurance.

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

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

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

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

35 (1) Rangeland fire protection association members must:

36 (a) Be at least 18 years old;

37 (b) During all fire suppression activities, use and maintain
38 personal protective equipment that meets published standards of the
39 Washington state department of natural resources or United States

1 bureau of land management as appropriate during wildfire suppression
2 activities; and

3 (c) Have achieved a basic level of wildland fire training. The
4 recommended training for a rangeland fire protection association
5 member participating in wildland fire suppression is training that
6 achieves the level of wildland firefighter 2, as specified in the
7 published standards of the national wildfire coordinating group.

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

10 (3) This section applies only to rangeland fire protection
11 associations operating pursuant to the pilot project established in
12 section 2 of this act. No person may form or participate in a
13 rangeland fire protection association except pursuant to the pilot
14 project established in section 2 of this act.

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

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