

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6202

AS OF JANUARY 29, 1992

Brief Description: Enacting the rural homeowners fire protection act.

SPONSORS: Senators Barr, Stratton, Saling and Amondson; by request of Department of Natural Resources

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

Staff: Vic Moon (786-7469)

Hearing Dates: January 30, 1992

BACKGROUND:

In the past decade Washington State has faced an increasing number of wild land fires where structures and lives have been threatened and high costs of fire protection have occurred. This has resulted from a rapidly growing population and the desire of many people to reside in natural settings. Many of the developing areas are still forested and are subject to periodic wildfires. Areas where new homes are being constructed in what was previously wild land have been called the wild land urban interface. In many cases, structures have been built and maintained with minimal awareness of the need for protection from exterior fire starts or the need to minimize interior fires from spreading to the wild lands surrounding the homes.

Over 150 homes have been lost to wildfires in Washington in the last seven years. Fire suppression costs are estimated to be \$12 million for the October fires in northeast Washington near Spokane. Washington is not unique in this situation; the problem has becoming critical in all of the western states.

SUMMARY:

The Rural Fire Homeowners Protection Act contains three approaches to addressing the wild land/urban interface fire problem. First, identification is made of areas having a high or extreme wildfire hazard level using a common rating system. Second, minimum standards to protect future developments are established for high or extreme hazardous areas. Finally, incentive programs are provided so that property owners will meet minimum fire protection standards.

The Department of Natural Resources in cooperation with other Washington State fire services will identify areas of high and extreme hazard risk levels and coordinate fire protection activities, including mutual aid programs, minimal levels of protection, emergency planning and prevention planning.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested January 20, 1992