

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1483

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, March 31, 1995

Title: An act relating to the prevention and suppression of forest wild fires.

Brief Description: Revising provisions on the prevention and suppression of forest wild fires.

Sponsors: House Committee on Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Pennington, Elliot, Stevens, Huff, Mielke, Johnson, L. Thomas, McMahan and Sheahan).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources: 3/23/95, 3/31/95 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Drew, Chair; Spanel, Vice Chair; A. Anderson, Hargrove, Haugen, Morton, Oke, Owen, Snyder, Strannigan and Swecker.

Staff: Vic Moon (786-7469)

Background: The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for prevention and suppression of forest fires on over 12 million acres of state and privately owned forest lands.

Current law acknowledges that forest lands within the state are increasingly being used for residential purposes. Current law also establishes that it is the department's primary mission to protect forest land and suppress forest fires and that a primary mission of rural fire districts and municipal fire departments is to protect improved property and suppress structural fires. However, this distinction grows more difficult to implement on the ground as more people build residences in the forest and forest fires threaten these structures.

The department's firefighting priorities are to first save human lives, then real property, then natural resources.

Summary of Bill: A new section restates current law with regard to the respective firefighting missions of the department and of rural fire districts and municipal fire departments. The department's firefighting priorities are changed such that protecting forest resources and suppressing forest wild fires is second only to saving lives. The most effective way to protect structures is for the department to focus its efforts and resources on aggressively suppressing forest wild fires.

The Legislature also acknowledges the natural role of fire in forest ecosystems and finds it to be in the public interest to use fire under controlled conditions to prevent wild fires by maintaining healthy forests and eliminating sources of fuel.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Because of the increase in forest wildfires, new legislative direction is needed.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Bob Gustavson, Washington Forest Protection Association (pro); Wade Boyd, Longview Fibre Co. (pro).