

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5463

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to forest fire protection assessments.

Brief Description: Modifying forest fire protection assessments.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senators Jacobsen, Rockefeller, Morton, Shin and Rasmussen; by request of Department of Natural Resources).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 3/19/07, 3/22/07 [DP];
Appropriations: 3/27/07 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Increases the Forest Fire Protection Assessments paid by forest landowners.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Blake, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Kagi, Lantz, McCoy, Newhouse and Strow.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Orcutt.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The costs of forest fire protection are intended to be equitably shared between forest landowners and the state. Owners of forest land are under an obligation to provide forest fire protection on their land at a level that provides adequate protection against the spread of fire from or across their land. However, if a landowner's property is located on forest land not included within the boundaries of a rural or municipal fire district, and the landowner fails to

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provide adequate protection against the spread of forest fire, then the landowner must pay to the Department of Natural Resources (Department) a forest fire protection assessment (assessment).

Landowners paying the assessment are billed both at a flat rate and at an additional rate according to the size of the forest land they own. All landowners must pay a flat rate assessment fee of \$14.50. This flat rate fee is paid by all forest land owners regardless of ownership size. Landowners who own more than 50 acres of forest land must pay the flat rate fee plus an additional 25 cents on each acre over the initial 50 acres.

Summary of Bill:

The forest fire protection assessment charge for forest landowners is increased. The flat fee assessment paid for the first 50 acres of forest land owned is increased from \$14.50 to \$17.50. The additional per acre assessment that applies to each acre owned over 50 acres is increased from 25 cents per acre to 27 cents per acre.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Raising the assessment is important for the Department to have continued funding for forest fire protection services. Increased funding allows the Department to respond to fires quickly, which is necessary to keep fires small and manageable.

An increase in the assessment is necessary to maintain the equitable fifty-fifty split in fire protection funding from the General Fund and private forest landowners. The shared funding of fire protection services is a model that has worked throughout the West, but has gotten out of balance in Washington. In the past, more than 50 percent of the fire protection funding came from landowner payments and the General Fund portion had to be increased to make the payment scheme equitable. Now more than 50 percent is coming from the General Fund, so it is only fair that landowner assessments are increased to again regain equitable funding.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Vicki Christiansen, Department of Natural Resources; Debora Munguia, Washington Forest Protection Association; and Tim Boyd, Port Blakely and Vaagen Brothers.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 33 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Dunshee, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Buri, Chandler, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunn, Ericks, Fromhold, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Kretz, Linville, McDermott, McDonald, McIntire, Morrell, Pettigrew, Priest, Schual-Berke, Seaquist, P. Sullivan and Walsh.

Staff: Alicia Dunkin (786-7178).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Agriculture & Natural Resources:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The companion House bill passed unanimously and the Department of Natural Resources has already provided you with testimony on that bill, which we will not repeat, but we urge your support of this bill.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Joe Shramek, Department of Natural Resources.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.