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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2093**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** House Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Short, Blake, Buys, and Condotta)

AN ACT Relating to wildland fire suppression; amending RCW 76.04.015; reenacting and amending RCW 76.04.005; adding a new section to chapter 43.30 RCW; adding new sections to chapter 76.04 RCW; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that wildland fires can be devastating to communities, agriculture, and forests. Wildland fires destroy property, cost large amounts of money, and put people at risk with the potential of death. Everything possible should be done to combat and prevent wildland fires from occurring. Properly managing forests, preventing insect infestations in forests, combating climate change, and ensuring that homes built in rural areas can better withstand wildland fires are important goals.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.30 RCW under the subchapter heading "organization" to read as follows:

(1) The commissioner must appoint a local wildland fire liaison that reports directly to the commissioner or the supervisor and generally represents the interests and concerns of landowners and the general public during any fire suppression activities of the department.

(2) The role of the local wildland fire liaison is to provide advice to the commissioner on issues such as access to land during fire suppression activities, the availability of local fire suppression assets, environmental concerns, and landowner interests.

(3) In appointing the local wildland fire liaison, the commissioner must consult with county legislative authorities either directly or through an organization that represents the interests of county legislative authorities.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The local wildland fire liaison created in section 2 of this act must prepare a report to the commissioner of public lands by December 31, 2015, that provides recommendations regarding:

(a) Opportunities for the department of natural resources to increase training with local fire protection districts;

(b) The ability to quickly evaluate the availability of local fire district resources in a manner that allows the local resources to be more efficiently and effectively dispatched to wildland fires; and

(c) Opportunities to increase and maintain the viability of local fire suppression assets.

(2) The department of natural resources must issue a report to the legislature consistent with RCW 43.01.036 by October 31, 2016, that summarizes the recommendations of the local wildland fire liaison, details steps taken to implement the recommendations, and offers an analyses of the results on the ground.

(3) This section expires July 1, 2017.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 76.04 RCW under the subchapter heading "administration" to read as follows:

(1) The commissioner must appoint and maintain a wildland fire advisory committee to generally advise the commissioner on all matters related to wildland firefighting in the state. This includes, but is not limited to, developing recommendations regarding department capital budget requests related to wildland firefighting and developing strategies to enhance the safe and effective use of private and public wildland firefighting resources.

(2) The commissioner may appoint members to the wildland fire advisory committee as the commissioner determines is the most helpful in the discharge of the commissioner's duties. However, at a minimum, the commissioner must invite the following:

(a) Two county commissioners, one from east of the crest of the Cascade mountains and one from west of the crest of the Cascade mountains;

(b) Two owners of industrial land, one an owner of timberland and one an owner of rangeland;

(c) The state fire marshal or a representative of the state fire marshal's office;

(d) Two individuals with the title of fire chief, one from a community located east of the crest of the Cascade mountains and one from a community located west of the crest of the Cascade mountains;

(e) A representative of a federal wildland firefighting agency;

(f) A representative of a tribal nation;

(g) A representative of a statewide environmental organization;

(h) A representative of a state land trust beneficiary; and

(i) A small forest landowner.

(3) The local wildland fire liaison serves as the administrative chair for the wildland fire advisory committee.

(4) The department must provide staff support for all committee meetings.

(5) The wildland fire advisory committee must meet at the call of the administrative chair for any purpose that directly relates to the duties set forth in subsection (1) of this section or as is otherwise requested by the commissioner or the administrative chair.

(6) Each member of the wildland fire advisory committee serves without compensation but may be reimbursed for travel expenses as authorized in RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

(7) The members of the wildland fire advisory committee, or individuals acting on their behalf, are immune from civil liability for official acts performed in the course of their duties.

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

(1)(a) An individual may, consistent with this section, enter privately owned or publicly owned land for the purposes of attempting to extinguish or control a wildland fire, regardless of whether the individual owns the land, when fighting the wildland fire in that particular time and location can be reasonably considered a public necessity due to an imminent danger.

(b) No civil or criminal liability may be imposed by any court on an individual acting pursuant to this section for any direct or proximate adverse impacts resulting from an individual's access to land for the purposes of attempting to extinguish or control a wildland fire when fighting the wildland fire in that particular time and location can be reasonably considered a public necessity, except upon proof of gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct by the individual.

(c) An individual may enter land under this subsection (1) only if:

(i) There is an active fire on or in near proximity to the land;

(ii) The individual has a reasonable belief that the local fire conditions are creating an emergency situation and that there is an imminent danger of a fire growing or spreading to or from the parcel of land being entered;

(iii) The individual has a reasonable belief that preventive measures will extinguish or control the wildfire;

(iv) The individual has a reasonable belief that he or she is capable of taking preventive measures;

(v) The individual only undertakes measures that are reasonable and necessary until professional wildfire suppression personnel arrives;

(vi) The individual does not continue to take suppression actions after specific direction to cease from the landowner;

(vii) The individual takes preventive measures only for the period of time until efforts to control the wildfire have been assumed by professional wildfire suppression personnel, unless explicitly authorized by professional wildland firefighting personnel to remain engaged in suppressing the fire;

(viii) The individual follows the instructions of professional wildfire fighting personnel, including ceasing to engage in firefighting activities, when directed to do so by professional wildland firefighting personnel; and

(ix) The individual promptly notifies emergency personnel and the landowner, lessee, or occupant prior to entering the land or within a reasonable time after the individual attempts to extinguish or control the wildland fire.

(d) Nothing in this section authorizes any person to materially benefit from accessing land or retain any valuable materials that may be collected or harvested during the time the individual attempts to extinguish or control the wildland fire.

(e)(i) The authority to enter privately owned or publicly owned land under this subsection (1) is limited to the minimum necessary activities reasonably required to extinguish or control the wildland fire.

(ii) Activities that may be reasonable under this subsection (1) include: Using hand tools to clear the ground of debris, operating readily available water hoses, clearing flammable materials from the vicinity of structures, unlocking or opening gates to assist firefighter access, and safely scouting and reporting fire behavior.

(iii) Activities that do not fall within the scope of this subsection (1)(e), due to the high potential for adverse consequences, include, but are not limited to: Lighting a fire in an attempt to stop the spread of another fire; using explosives as a firefighting technique; using aircraft for fire suppression; and directing other individuals to engage in firefighting.

(f) Nothing in this subsection (1) confers a legal or civil duty or obligation on a person to attempt to extinguish or control a wildfire.

(2)(a) No civil or criminal liability may be imposed by any court on the owner, lessee, or occupant of any land accessed as permitted under subsection (1) of this section for any direct or proximate adverse impacts resulting from the access to privately owned or publicly owned land allowed under subsection (1) of this section, except upon proof of willful or wanton misconduct by the owner, lessee, or occupant. The barriers to civil and criminal liability imposed by this subsection include, but are not limited to, impacts on:

(i) The individual accessing the privately owned or publicly owned land and the individual's personal property, including loss of life;

(ii) Any structures or land alterations constructed by individuals entering the privately owned or publicly owned land;

(iii) Other landholdings; and

(iv) Overall environmental resources.

(b) This subsection (2) does not apply in any case where liability for damages is provided under RCW 4.24.040.

(3) Nothing in this section limits or otherwise effects any other statutory or common law provisions relating to land access or the control of a conflagration.

**Sec.**  RCW 76.04.015 and 2012 c 38 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department may, at its discretion, appoint trained personnel possessing the necessary qualifications to carry out the duties and supporting functions of the department and may determine their respective salaries.

(2) The department shall have direct charge of and supervision of all matters pertaining to the forest fire service of the state.

(3) The department shall:

(a) Enforce all laws within this chapter;

(b) Be empowered to take charge of and direct the work of suppressing forest fires;

(c)(i) Investigate the origin and cause of all forest fires to determine whether either a criminal act or negligence by any person, firm, or corporation caused the starting, spreading, or existence of the fire. In conducting investigations, the department shall work cooperatively, to the extent possible, with utilities, property owners, and other interested parties to identify and preserve evidence. Except as provided otherwise in this subsection, the department in conducting investigations is authorized, without court order, to take possession or control of relevant evidence found in plain view and belonging to any person, firm, or corporation. To the extent possible, the department shall notify the person, firm, or corporation of its intent to take possession or control of the evidence. The person, firm, or corporation shall be afforded reasonable opportunity to view the evidence and, before the department takes possession or control of the evidence, also shall be afforded reasonable opportunity to examine, document, and photograph it. If the person, firm, or corporation objects in writing to the department's taking possession or control of the evidence, the department must either return the evidence within seven days after the day on which the department is provided with the written objections or obtain a court order authorizing the continued possession or control.

(ii) Absent a court order authorizing otherwise, the department may not take possession or control of evidence over the objection of the owner of the evidence if the evidence is used by the owner in conducting a business or in providing an electric utility service and the department's taking possession or control of the evidence would substantially and materially interfere with the operation of the business or provision of electric utility service.

(iii) Absent a court order authorizing otherwise, the department may not take possession or control of evidence over the objection of an electric utility when the evidence is not owned by the utility but has caused damage to property owned by the utility. However, this subsection (3)(c)(iii) does not apply if the department has notified the utility of its intent to take possession or control of the evidence and provided the utility with reasonable time to examine, document, and photograph the evidence.

(iv) Only personnel qualified to work on electrical equipment may take possession or control of evidence owned or controlled by an electric utility;

(d) Furnish notices or information to the public calling attention to forest fire dangers and the penalties for violation of this chapter;

(e) Be familiar with all timbered and cut-over areas of the state; ((~~and~~))

(f) Maximize the effective utilization of local fire suppression assets consistent with section 7 of this act; and

(g) Regulate and control the official actions of its employees, the wardens, and the rangers.

(4) The department may:

(a) Authorize all needful and proper expenditures for forest protection;

(b) Adopt rules consistent with this section for the prevention, control, and suppression of forest fires as it considers necessary including but not limited to: Fire equipment and materials; use of personnel; and fire prevention standards and operating conditions including a provision for reducing these conditions where justified by local factors such as location and weather;

(c) Remove at will the commission of any ranger or suspend the authority of any warden;

(d) Inquire into:

(i) The extent, kind, value, and condition of all timber lands within the state;

(ii) The extent to which timber lands are being destroyed by fire and the damage thereon;

(e) Provide fire detection, prevention, presuppression, or suppression services on nonforested public lands managed by the department or another state agency, but only to the extent that providing these services does not interfere with or detract from the obligations set forth in subsection (3) of this section. If the department provides fire detection, prevention, presuppression, or suppression services on nonforested public lands managed by another state agency, the department must be fully reimbursed for the work through a cooperative agreement as provided for in RCW 76.04.135(1).

(5) Any rules adopted under this section for the suppression of forest fires must include a mechanism by which a local fire mobilization radio frequency, consistent with RCW 43.43.963, is identified and made available during the initial response to any forest fire that crosses jurisdictional lines so that all responders have access to communications during the response. Different initial response frequencies may be identified and used as appropriate in different geographic response areas. If the fire radio communication needs escalate beyond the capability of the identified local radio frequency, the use of other available designated interoperability radio frequencies may be used.

(6) When the department considers it to be in the best interest of the state, it may cooperate with any agency of another state, the United States or any agency thereof, the Dominion of Canada or any agency or province thereof, and any county, town, corporation, individual, or Indian tribe within the state of Washington in forest firefighting and patrol.

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

(1) To maximize the effective utilization of local fire suppression assets, the department is required to:

(a) Compile and annually update a master list of qualified fire suppression contractors who have a valid incident qualification card, commonly referred to as a red card, stating current qualifications and make the list available to county legislative authorities, emergency management departments, and local fire districts;

(b) Cooperate with federal wildland firefighting agencies to maximize, based on predicted need, the efficient use of local resources in close proximity to wildland fire incidents;

(c) Enter into preemptive agreements with landowners in possession of firefighting capability that may be utilized in wildland fire suppression efforts, including the use of bulldozers, fallers, fuel tenders, potable water tenders, water sprayers, wash trailers, refrigeration units, and buses; and

(d) Conduct outreach to provide basic incident command system and wildland fire safety training to landowners in possession of firefighting capability to help ensure that any wildland fire suppression actions taken by private landowners on their own land are accomplished safely and in coordination with any related incident command structure.

(2) When entering into preemptive agreements with landowners under this section, the department must ensure that:

(a) All equipment and personnel satisfy department standards; and

(b) All contractors are, when engaged in fire suppression activities, under the supervision of recognized wildland fire personnel.

(3) No civil liability may be imposed by any court on the state or its officers and employees for any adverse impacts resulting from training provided by the department or preemptive agreements entered into by the department under the provisions of this section except upon proof of gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

**Sec.**  RCW 76.04.005 and 2014 c 90 s 1 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

As used in this chapter, the following terms have the meanings indicated unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Additional fire hazard" means a condition existing on any land in the state:

(a) Covered wholly or in part by forest debris which is likely to further the spread of fire and thereby endanger life or property; or

(b) When, due to the effects of disturbance agents, broken, down, dead, or dying trees exist on forest land in sufficient quantity to be likely to further the spread of fire within areas covered by a forest health hazard warning or order issued by the commissioner of public lands under RCW 76.06.180. The term "additional fire hazard" does not include green trees or snags left standing in upland or riparian areas under the provisions of RCW 76.04.465 or chapter 76.09 RCW.

(2) "Closed season" means the period between April 15th and October 15th, unless the department designates different dates because of prevailing fire weather conditions.

(3) "Department" means the department of natural resources, or its authorized representatives, as defined in chapter 43.30 RCW.

(4) "Department protected lands" means all lands subject to the forest protection assessment under RCW 76.04.610 or covered under contract or agreement pursuant to RCW 76.04.135 by the department.

(5) "Disturbance agent" means those forces that damage or kill significant numbers of forest trees, such as insects, diseases, wind storms, ice storms, and fires.

(6) "Emergency fire costs" means those costs incurred or approved by the department for emergency forest fire suppression, including the employment of personnel, rental of equipment, and purchase of supplies over and above costs regularly budgeted and provided for nonemergency fire expenses for the biennium in which the costs occur.

(7) "Exploding target" means a device that is designed or marketed to ignite or explode when struck by firearm ammunition or other projectiles.

(8) "Forest debris" includes forest slash, chips, and any other vegetative residue resulting from activities on forest land.

(9) "Forest fire service" includes all wardens, rangers, and other persons employed especially for preventing or fighting forest fires.

(10) "Forest land" means any unimproved lands which have enough trees, standing or down, or flammable material, to constitute in the judgment of the department, a fire menace to life or property. Sagebrush and grass areas east of the summit of the Cascade mountains may be considered forest lands when such areas are adjacent to or intermingled with areas supporting tree growth. Forest land, for protection purposes, does not include structures.

(11) "Forest landowner," "owner of forest land," "landowner," or "owner" means the owner or the person in possession of any public or private forest land.

(12) "Forest material" means forest slash, chips, timber, standing or down, or other vegetation.

(13) "Incendiary ammunition" means ammunition that is designed to ignite or explode upon impact with or penetration of a target or designed to trace its course in the air with a trail of smoke, chemical incandescence, or fire.

(14) "Landowner operation" means every activity, and supporting activities, of a forest landowner and the landowner's agents, employees, or independent contractors or permittees in the management and use of forest land subject to the forest protection assessment under RCW 76.04.610 for the primary benefit of the owner. The term includes, but is not limited to, the growing and harvesting of forest products, the development of transportation systems, the utilization of minerals or other natural resources, and the clearing of land. The term does not include recreational and/or residential activities not associated with these enumerated activities.

(15) "Participating landowner" means an owner of forest land whose land is subject to the forest protection assessment under RCW 76.04.610.

(16) "Sky lantern" means an unmanned self-contained luminary device that uses heated air produced by an open flame or produced by another source to become or remain airborne.

(17) "Slash" means organic forest debris such as tree tops, limbs, brush, and other dead flammable material remaining on forest land as a result of a landowner operation.

(18) "Slash burning" means the planned and controlled burning of forest debris on forest lands by broadcast burning, underburning, pile burning, or other means, for the purposes of silviculture, hazard abatement, or reduction and prevention or elimination of a fire hazard.

(19) "Suppression" means all activities involved in the containment and control of forest fires, including the patrolling thereof until such fires are extinguished or considered by the department to pose no further threat to life or property.

(20) "Unimproved lands" means those lands that will support grass, brush and tree growth, or other flammable material when such lands are not cleared or cultivated and, in the opinion of the department, are a fire menace to life and property.

(21) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of public lands.

(22) "Local fire suppression assets" means firefighting equipment that is located in close proximity to the wildland fire and that meets department standards and requirements.

(23) "Local wildland fire liaison" means the person appointed by the commissioner to serve as the local wildland fire liaison as provided in section 2 of this act.

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