Washington State
House of Representatives
Office of Program Research

BILL ANALYSIS

Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee

HB 1048

Brief Description: Concerning a rangeland fire protection association pilot project.

Sponsors: Representatives Dent, Griffey and Nance.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a rangeland fire protection association (RFPA) pilot project.
- Establishes criteria for RFPAs.

Hearing Date: 1/22/25

Staff: Lily Smith (786-7175).

Background:

Department of Natural Resources and Forest Fires.
The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for forest fire prevention and response on both private and state-owned forestland in Washington. The DNR may cooperate with any agency of another state, a federal agency, or any county, town, corporation, person, or Indian tribe. The DNR may also contract and enter into agreements with private corporations, including wildland fire suppression contractors, for the protection of forestlands within the state.

Fire Protection Service Agencies.
A fire protection service agency is a public entity responsible for the provision of firefighting services, to include, among others, fire protection districts, regional fire protection service authorities, and the DNR.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Rangeland Fire Protection Associations.
Rangeland fire protection associations (RFPA)s are volunteer—based groups organized for local fire protection. Structurally, RFPAs are independent, generally nonprofit, organizations governed by their members. Washington does not have a structure for recognizing or incorporating rangeland fire protection associations into the existing scheme of public fire protection services.

Summary of Bill:

Between 2026 and 2029, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must conduct a rangeland fire protection association (RFPA) pilot project (pilot) in Eastern Washington to assess measures needed for the safe and effective operation of RFPAs. A nonprofit or unincorporated RFPA may be formed under the pilot in areas outside the boundaries of fire protection service agencies and may enter into agreements with those agencies for wildfire detection, prevention, and suppression. No person may form or participate in an RFPA outside of the pilot.

An RFPA formed under the pilot must:
- be named as such;
- identify its service boundaries;
- have liability insurance;
- use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) during fire suppression; and
- have members meeting age and training requirements.

The operations of an RFPA may extend onto DNR-protected lands on a limited basis for the purpose of wildfire suppression.

In implementing the pilot, the DNR:
- must develop and publish recommendations concerning the formation and other aspects of an RFPA; and
- must review and inspect an RFPA for certain structural and operational elements.

The DNR must report to the Legislature on the pilot by December 1 of each year. The authority for the pilot and to form an RFPA expires June 30, 2030.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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