



HB 2579 – Wildland Fire Mitigation – Ready, Set, Go!

Background & Identified Problem

Wildfire occurrence, fire intensity and values-at-risk have continued to increase across the state in recent years. Three of the primary causal factors behind these increases are population growth, changes in land use, and weather patterns and drought. The 2015 wildfire season was one of the worst in history and caused untold millions of dollars' worth of fire-related damages, with over one million acres burned in 2015 alone. Costs associated with ongoing fire resource deployment, state fire mobilization, as well as lingering air quality issues and freight delay due to road closures, have added up to one of the costliest fire seasons on record.

Purpose and Scope of Legislation

The Washington Fire Chiefs are proposing a modest legislative proposal that would task the state with adopting a nationally-recognized fire mitigation program, such as the "Ready Set Go!" plan. This plan, which provides coordination and implementation assistance for local jurisdictions, establishes operational concepts and identifies responsibilities and tasks required to carry out a comprehensive wildfire management program.

This type of program uses a three-tiered system involving 1) communities and citizens, 2) local fire departments and local response resources responding to wildfires across the state, and 3) state wildfire mobilization to assist local and state resources. The bill would require development of individualized community-wide protection plans that include public education such as Firewise; partnership building between the state Fire Marshal's Office, local fire jurisdictions, and local homeowners; and personal wildfire action plans for individuals living in the areas most impacted by wildfires.

Funding & Cost Savings

The bill would allow for 5% of the unallocated general-fund portion of the fire insurance premium tax, or approximately \$700,000, to be used for necessary pre-fire mitigation planning and for the development of a small grant program to help local communities that wish to adopt the Wildland Urban Interface Code. By spending just a fraction of what the state allocates to fire mobilization and other post-fire costs on pre-fire planning, the state could save millions in future allocations.

Support of all Fire Service

WFC has worked closely with our fire service partners, including the Washington State Council of Firefighters, the WA Fire Commissioners Association, the WA Fire Marshals Association, and the WA State Firefighters Association to create a priority bill supported by the entire fire service community.

For further information, please contact:

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The Washington Fire Chiefs Association urges your support of this important legislation.