



HB 2228 – Early Deployment of Fire Mobilization Resources

Background

Wildland fires have increased in frequency and intensity in recent years, and the cost of fighting wildfires is immense:

- According to the 2018 U.S. Forest Service Study (“Pacific Northwest Region Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment”), which looked at the likelihood of a wildfire burning at a given location and the potential intensity of a wildfire if one were to occur, 2.2 million homes are in the potential wake of a wildfire. Researchers simulated wildfires across the state and used those models to identify homes within burn areas.
- Washington State has over 4,536 square miles of wildland-urban interface, containing more than 950,000 homes.
- According to the Northwest Coordination Center, the annual cost to suppress large wildfires (more than 100 acres of forestland or 300 acres of grassland) in Washington State has quadrupled from \$37 million in 2008-2012, to \$153 million in 2013-2018.
- Suppression costs make up just an estimated 9 percent of the total costs of wildfires once lost business, infrastructure, habitat, timber, grazing, and agriculture resources, disaster recovery, and health impacts are considered. (Source: Headwaters Economics, 2018a. Economic Prole System Report: Land Use and Wildland Urban Interface.)

Current Law

Under RCW 43.43.960, the Fire Service Resource Mobilization Plan is implemented to provide personnel, equipment, and other logistical resources when a wildland fire or other emergency exceeds the firefighting capacity of local jurisdictions.

Under current law, a request for State Mobilization may occur only when a local Fire Chief has expended all available local resources and mutual aid resources.

The Problem

Unfortunately, by having to wait until an incident has already grown to a sufficient size and scope to exceed all local and mutual aid resources, it is often too late to prevent significant damage to property, habitat, or even life.

The Solution

HB 2228 would amend the Fire Service Resource Mobilization Plan to allow for early deployment of critical fire service mobilization resources in those instances where it is certain the fire would otherwise exceed local and mutual aid capabilities. Predicted weather events, such as abundant lightning, can quickly overwhelm local resources. Mobilizing resources sooner can provide critical resources allowing for the suppression of fires while they’re small, thus preventing costly large fires that put our communities and firefighters at risk.