

RCW 76.04.167 Legislative declaration—Equitable sharing of forest fire protection costs—Coordinated forest fire protection and suppression. (1) The legislature hereby finds and declares that:

(a) Forest wildfires are a threat to public health and safety and can cause catastrophic damage to public and private resources, including clean air, clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, timber resources, forest soils, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, economic and employment opportunities, structures, and other improvements;

(b) Forestland owners and the public have a shared interest in protecting forests and forest resources by preventing and suppressing forest wildfires;

(c) A recent independent analysis of the state fire program considered it imperative to restore a more equitable split between the general fund and forest protection assessments;

(d) Without a substantial increase in forest protection funds, the state's citizens will be paying much more money for emergency fire suppression; and

(e) It is therefore the intent of the legislature that the costs of fire protection be equitably shared between the forest protection assessment account and state contributions to ensure that there will be sufficient firefighters who are equipped and trained to respond quickly to fires in order to keep fires small and manage those large fires that do occur. In recognition of increases in landowner assessments, the legislature declares its intent that increases in the state's share for forest protection should be provided to stabilize the funding for the forest protection program, and that sufficient state funds should be committed to the forest protection program so that the recommendations contained in the 1997 tridata report can be implemented on an equitable basis.

(2) The legislature hereby finds and declares that it is in the public interest to establish and maintain a complete, cooperative, and coordinated forest fire protection and suppression program for the state; that, second only to saving lives, the primary mission of the department is protecting forest resources and suppressing forest wildfires; that a primary mission of rural fire districts and municipal fire departments is protecting improved property and suppressing structural fires; and that the most effective way to protect structures is for the department to focus its efforts and resources on aggressively suppressing forest wildfires.

(3) The legislature also acknowledges the natural role of fire in forest ecosystems, and finds and declares it in the public interest to use fire under controlled conditions to prevent wildfires by maintaining healthy forests and eliminating sources of fuel. [2001 c 279 § 1; 1995 c 151 § 1.]