



HB 2561 Status Report to the Legislature

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**

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Approximately quantify the areas in the state that are not contained within an established fire district nor subject to planned fire response.

There are approximately 363,000 acres of land in the state that is not currently within an established fire district or subject to a planned response.

How these areas could be protected as well as a source of funding for any recommended activities.

During the development of the 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategic Plan (December 2018), the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee, through the Liaison, convened a workshop to explore solutions for protecting lands in Eastern Washington that currently have no wildland fire protection. Participants included affected landowners, fire protection district personnel, non-governmental organizations as well as federal and state wildland fire response agencies.

At the conclusion of the workshop, it was clear that there was no consensus for a particular solution for protecting these areas. Participants would only agree to a suite of potential solutions that could provide protection for unprotected lands. There were a number of factors that influenced participants recommending one solution over another, and included concerns of how protection would be paid for, the history and culture of fire response in the area, and values and assets at risk.

For the purposes of this report, the committee endorses the list of potential solutions as outlined in the *Washington Rangeland and Arid Lands Wildfire Workshop, Summary Report (July 2018)*:

- Establish rangeland fire protection associations
- Annex in to a nearby fire protection district
- Create a new fire protection district
- Assessment paid to DNR for protection

These solutions involve legal and policy actions to assign responsibility for protection, provide assistance to ensure safe and effective response, and address resource constraints. The advisory committee recommends that all affected parties be consulted as solutions are developed and implemented.

In addition the committee supports the goals and strategies outlined in the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy that address unprotected lands. These include:

- Response is safe and effective (Goal 4)
 - Establish effective wildland fire protection for all lands (Strategy 9)
 - Through legislation establish rangeland fire protection associations as an option for protection (Strategy 9.1)
 - Support annexation or creation of a new fire district as an option for protection (Strategy 9.2)

The *Washington Rangeland and Arid Lands Wildfire Workshop, Summary Report* does not specifically address funding sources for each of the solutions. The advisory committee believes that the funding

source to establish and maintain a fire protection district, or to annex into a current fire protection district, are adequately established in current law.

As advanced by those advocating for rangeland fire protection associations, funding would come through association fees from members at a rate established when an association is formed.

DNR may collect a forest fire protection assessment on forestland and provide fire protection¹. In many cases, the areas not within an established fire district are not forestland and therefore DNR could not collect an assessment and provide protection. In other cases, there may be discrete areas of forestland, but they are so removed from the core of DNR's response resources as to be impractical to provide protection.

The advisory committee supports the strategies contained in the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy as they relate to funding the recommended activities for protecting current unprotected areas. This may include the following goals and strategies:

- Washington's preparedness, response, and recovery systems are fully capable, integrated, and sustainable (Goal 1)
 - Advance sustainable funding (Strategy 4)
 - Identify and evaluate alternative, sustainable funding mechanisms for resilience and wildland fire suppression (Strategy 4.2)
 - Convene a taskforce to develop and advance funding strategies (Strategy 4.3)

Review the relevant recommendations contained in the joint legislative audit and review committee's report on fees assessed for fire protection.

The advisory committee has reviewed the joint legislative audit and review committee's (JLARC) 2017 Report: *Fees Assessed for Forest Fire Protection*, and the two recommendations contained therein.

Analyze and develop recommendations on potential administrative and legislative actions.

The advisory committee concurs with recommendations of the JLARC 2017 Report: *Fees Assessed for Forest Fire Protection*. They include the following:

1. DNR should clarify the definition of forestland and implement a process to consistently apply the definition across the state
2. DNR should coordinate with county officials to create consistent policies for administering the assessment

The advisory committee endorses a process similar to that contained in Substitute Senate Bill 6575, Laws of 2018, to address areas of the state that currently have no wildland fire protection and may be subject to annexation by a fire protection district.

¹ RCW 76.04.610

Examine the value of community programs that educate homeowners and engage in preventative projects within communities at risk.

The committee anticipated the development and completion of the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy before beginning a specific evaluation of community programs. The advisory committee was consulted by DNR as it developed the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy, which includes goals and strategies related to wildfire risk communication as well as wildfire reduction through prevention and mitigation.

Development of the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy has provided an opportunity for DNR to communicate with stakeholders and practitioners about the role community programs will play in educating homeowners about the risks associated with wildfire, and carrying out projects to reduce wildfire risk. The committee will utilize the data and information gathered in this process to provide a comprehensive evaluation of these types of programs for the final report to the Legislature, due November 2019.

In the interim, the advisory committee supports the goals and various strategies outlined in the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy, that when implemented, would enhance the education of homeowners and reduce the wildfire risk to communities. Some examples of goals and strategies that can achieve this include:

- Washington's preparedness, response, and recovery systems are fully, capable, integrated, and sustainable (Goal 1)
 - Establish regional and local coordinating capacity (Strategy 1.3)
 - Quantify current and projected wildland fire risk (Strategy 2.1)
 - Conduct comprehensive risk-mitigation planning to prioritize actions (Strategy 2.2)
- Communities are prepared and adapted for current and future wildland fire regimes (Goal 3)
 - Develop and implement engagement strategies such as community-based social marketing, that foster behavior change (Strategy 6.1)
 - Increase capacity, coordination, and networking of community assistance programs (Strategy 6.3)
 - Facilitate adoption of land use plans, regulations and codes that reduce wildland fire risk in the wildland urban interface (Strategy 6.4)

It is worth noting that many Washington communities, individuals, and agency partners are actively working to reduce wildland fire risk across Washington.

Develop plans to help protect non-English speaking residents during wildfire emergencies.

The advisory committee anticipated the development and completion of the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy before developing specific plans to support protecting non-English speaking residents during wildfire emergencies. The advisory committee was consulted by DNR as it developed the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy, which includes goals and strategies related to enhancing communication and engagement with limited English proficiency communities in the state.

The committee has been in contact with the Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division (EMD) to coordinate similar planning efforts by EMD.

Now that the Wildland Fire Protection Strategy is completed, the advisory committee will use data and information assembled by the department during development of the strategy to recommend specific plans to protect non-English speaking residents, which will be included in DNR's final report to the Legislature in November.

As an interim step, the advisory committee supports the goals and strategies identified in the new Wildland Fire Protection Strategy that can enhance engagement with limited English proficiency communities, and ultimately lead to better protection for these communities. Some examples of the goals and strategies that can achieve this include:

- Washington's preparedness, response, and recovery systems are fully, capable, integrated, and sustainable (Goal 1)
 - Establish regional and local coordinating capacity (Strategy 1.3)
 - Establish fire-adapted community coordinator positions (Strategy 1.3 b)
- Communities are prepared and adapted for current and future wildland fire regimes (Goal 3)
 - Develop and implement engagement strategies such as community-based social marketing, that foster behavior change (Strategy 6.1)
 - Enhance engagement with limited English proficiency communities (Strategy 6.2)
 - Developing curriculum for, and provide cultural competency training to, first responders and community engagement organizations/specialists (Strategy 6.2 a)
 - Identify LEP (limited English proficiency) leaders and organizations in high-risk communities, and develop effective long-term partnerships (Strategy 6.2 b)
 - Provide high-quality, professional translation and interpretation (Strategy 6.2 c)