

HB 1271 – EARLY DEPLOYMENT OF FIRE MOBILIZATION RESOURCES



BACKGROUND

The Washington Fire Service & our State & Federal partners work together to minimize the damage to life, property, & the environment caused by catastrophic fires & all-hazard incidents. The WFS recognizes the importance of emergency response times as key factors in minimizing the damage caused by wildland fires. Pre-positioning of Washington Fire Service organizations improves response times and increases the probability that some fires will achieve an earlier containment. As a result of recent legislative budget provisos, pre-positioned mobilization teams & DNR were successful in minimizing fire growth in Kittitas County (2023 & 2024), Yakima County (2023 & 2024), Klickitat (2023), & Spokane County (2023).

HB 1271 would build on the demonstrated success of the pilot program & allow pre-positioning of fire service for all-hazard incidents, including wildfire throughout the state when needed. Proactively responding & extinguishing fires saves money, minimizes damage, & allows firefighting resources to be used more efficiently in the protection of our great State.

The WA Fire Service acknowledges the need for increased staffing in the Fire Mobilization Program with the State Fire Marshal's Office. HB1271 has operated under the current staffing available to the program & the Fiscal Note for FTEs should be addressed under separate legislation to address the entirety of the staffing needs of the Fire Mobilization Program, not a single component.

THE CURRENT LAW

Under current law, a request for State Mobilization may occur only when a local Fire Chief has expended all available local resources & mutual aid resources. Local Fire Chief submits a request for mobilization resources & the Chief of Washington State Patrol approves the request in accordance with the plan.

THE PROBLEM

Delaying response & suppression efforts until an incident exceeds local & mutual aid resources is often too late to prevent significant damage to life, property, & the environment. Proactive response & suppression efforts reduce the number of catastrophic fires in Washington State & utilizes our firefighting resources in a safer & more effective manner.

THE SOLUTION

HB 1271 would amend the Fire Service Resource Mobilization RCW to allow for early deployment of critical fire service mobilization resources in those instances where it is predicted the fire would otherwise exceed local & mutual aid capabilities. 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 & firefighters at risk.

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