



**DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

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OF PUBLIC LANDS**

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**To:** George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management and State Forester  
**CC:** Russ Lane, Wildland Fire Management Division Manager  
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**From:** Allen Lebovitz, Chair, Wildland Fire Advisory Committee  
**Date:** December 20, 2021  
**Subject:** **REVIEW DRAFT** - Wildland Fire Advisory Committee Tasking for SSHB 1168  
Implementation – Fire District Assistance Program (FDAP) Plan Review  
**Attached:** Fire District Needs Assessment

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**Title:** Fire District Assistance Program (FDAP) Plan Review

**Requested By:** George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management and State Forester

**Task Leader:** Allen Lebovitz, Wildland Fire Advisory Committee Chair

**Task:** The intent of this task was to engage the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee (WFAC) to provide recommendations to the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) concerning the proposed plan for implementing the FDAP directed by SSHB 1168 (Bill), to be established in the 2021 – 2023 biennium. The WFAC was asked to provide a review of the program plan and granting criteria and recommendations, in the context of five topics. The following is the review and recommendations of the WFAC.

**1. Task description:**

A. Review and validate a list of communities identified as at the greatest risk and least resilient to wildfire, have also historically been underserved by resiliency and prevention programs, and have the least capacity to recover from wildfires. Using environmental justice and equity focused tools, ensure these communities are consistent with the definition of “highly impacted communities” as defined in [RCW 19.405.020](#), definition 23. See also definition 40, “vulnerable populations”.

1. While a list of communities meeting these definitions has not yet be created for the purpose of equitably providing assistance to fire districts in at risk, highly impacted, vulnerable, and currently under-served communities, the approach being developed is believed to be consistent with that intent. The criteria selected so far are generally believed to be effective for this purpose. As refinements to the criteria are made and a list of communities developed, it is recommended that the Committee review and help validate them.

B. Assess and provide recommendations on whether the proposed FDAP plan effectively identifies and addresses current and anticipated fire district needs.

1. It is believed that the proposed plan identifies and addresses the current needs of fire districts well. It is recommended to actively consider the variability in the range of needs between larger, smaller, more urban, and more rural fire districts, and tailor the assistance to the districts. The attached fire district assistance needs assessment speaks to this variability. It is also advised to regularly assess how these needs change over time, particularly as the impact of the new funding is realized. Complete district needs assessments and evaluate program criteria and funding mechanisms to ensure alignment as needs evolve. Further, the following recommendations are offered for fine tuning the assistance provided by the program.

- i. Consider training a core need to be provided for by the program.
- ii. Provide training for volunteers in their home areas and on nights and weekends to accommodate schedules of volunteers.
- iii. Consider PPE a core need to be provided for by the program.
- iv. Consider reimbursing fuel costs of small fire districts participating in IA.
- v. Consider providing surplus pickups and SUVs along with fire engines.
- vi. Consider providing funding for equipment maintenance that goes along with surplus equipment grants.
- vii. Consider developing a mechanism for assisting rural fire districts with supporting the use of county department of public works equipment for fire suppression activities.
- viii. Determine how to assist small fire districts with increasing staffing capacity. Consider providing grants or personnel on details to meet this need.

C. Assess whether the FDAP plan identifies and addresses the current and anticipated fire district needs across the state in a manner that provides benefits equitably across all communities, and in particular, addresses the needs of the state's most vulnerable populations and residents.

1. Income inequality, resulting from small populations in some rural districts and/or low median community income, leading to a small tax base, and consequently limited fire district budgets, is believed to be a significant factor affecting the equitable provision of fire district protection to many communities. The program should prioritize establishing criteria for addressing this inequality through such things as:
- a. Reducing matching requirements for districts with limited budgets.
  - b. Support using state funds to provide match to federal grant programs.
  - c. Adjust grant criteria that considers population to accommodate mergers of small districts into one.
  - d. Simplify application and reporting processes to the greatest extent possible to assist districts that have limited administrative capacity.

D. Assess and provide recommendations on whether the proposed organizational structure is effectively and efficiently designed to build and support the operations of the FDAP.

1. The approach of staffing regional fire district coordinators is highly supported. As the program is implemented though, consider how change fire district needs and relationships change over time and account for this in how the program is operated and staffed. Further, consider how coordinators can help identify the districts that serve vulnerable, and currently under-served communities, when awarding funding preferences to improve equity.

E. Identify key partners and stakeholders that should be engaged when implementing the FDAP.

1. Washington Fire Chiefs
2. Washington Fire Commissioners Association
3. Washington State Firefighters Association.
4. Fire Service Leadership Forum.
5. Council of Washington State Fire Marshals

F. Provide other feedback and recommendations that you believe are important to consider in the development of the FDAP.

1. Review the fire district assistance grant criteria used by Washington State Patrol to determine if there are criteria that should be modeled.
2. Review and consider adapting criteria based upon the results of the Community Risk Assessment being completed by the Community Risk Reduction program.
3. Consider prioritizing grants for districts that provide mutual aid on wildland fire incidents.
4. Consider including a criterion that requires a minimum number of firefighters in a district that are qualified to respond to wildland incidents, or that provide a commitment to obtain wildland training, to ensure the greatest use of granted resources.
5. Consider prioritizing funding to support services or expand services to unprotected and/or under-protected lands.
6. Consider prioritizing funding to districts in an area that is currently greatly underserved for wildland fire response.