

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

RS18389

The Department of Lands is responsible for wild land fire protection on about six million acres of state and private forest lands. Funding for preparedness (having trained crews and equipment ready for fire season) is partially paid for by forest landowner assessments. Current assessments are at the maximums established in code, yet income is not keeping pace with inflationary and other cost increases. The dedicated Forest Protection Fund established for these fees is poised to go negative in FY-2010. This legislation will raise the assessment caps which will allow the State Board of Land Commissioners to set assessments at rates that cover expected costs. In addition, this legislation will establish a "Wildfire Equipment Replacement Fund" to be used for the replacement of capital wildfire equipment, such as fire trucks, to help defray the costs of replacing this equipment, over time.

FISCAL NOTE

At current appropriation levels, the Forest Protection Fund is expected to go negative in fiscal year 2010 - triggering a reduction in fire fighting forces. Reduced forces will result in less successful initial attack and more expensive large fires. This will negatively impact the general fund, which pays for fire suppression efforts through deficiency warrants. Increasing assessments will impact forest landowners. However, a majority of forest landowners, including members of the Intermountain Forest Industry Association and the Idaho Forest Owners Association, believe increased fees are needed at this time.

Contact:

Name: George Bacon

Office: Idaho Dept of Lands

Phone: (208) 334-0242