

SB 1515 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Wildfire Reduction and Recovery

Action Date: 02/10/20

Action: Do pass with amendments and requesting referral to Ways and Means. (Printed A-Engrossed.)

Vote: 5-0-0-0

Yeas: 5 - Baertschiger Jr, Frederick, Golden, Prozanski, Thatcher

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 2/3, 2/5, 2/10

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to research the creation of a wildfire workforce foundation to achieve forest restoration and wildfire reduction through youth workforce development programs. Requires the HECC to: conduct market, legal, and fiscal research; identify potential collaborators; inventory existing wildfire workforce programs; ensure the foundation receives private and public funds, including federal support if possible; and create a case statement for potential donors. Requires the HECC to report the results to a legislative committee related to wildfire by December 1, 2020. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Opportunities for private and federal investment in forest fuel reduction
- Youth workforce development in forest industries
- Eugene-based wildland urban interface fuel reduction pilot project
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as a model
- Higher Education Coordinating Commission industry and workforce partnerships

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Replaces the Office of the State Treasurer with the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for the purpose of carrying out the functions of the bill. Clarifies that the requirement to create a case statement for potential foundation donors should emphasize the potential benefits for private sector businesses and foundations. Changes report due date from September 15 to December 1, 2020.

BACKGROUND:

Several youth workforce programs implement forest health and forest fuel load reduction projects in Oregon. These programs offer young people an education-based work experience modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. The Oregon Office of Workforce Investments administers and supports two of these programs, the state AmeriCorps program and Oregon Youth Corps. State AmeriCorps program grantees operate in metro and rural counties to improve public lands through habitat restoration, tree planting, trail maintenance, and wildfire reduction activities. The Oregon Youth Corps provides young people in most counties forest health jobs that include slash piling, removing invasive fuels, building lines for prescribed burns, and restoring habitat in the aftermath of fire. In addition, the Eugene-based Northwest Youth Corps also operates in Oregon. The organization recently started a wildland urban interface fuels reduction pilot project in the Southeast neighborhood of Eugene. The goal of the project is to educate property owners on the value of defensible space by offering evaluations and consultation, educational resources, and prescription-based fuel management on both private and public lands. The youth crews work in partnership with the Oregon Department of Forestry, Eugene Public Works, and Eugene Springfield Fire to achieve project outcomes.

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While no wildfire workforce foundation currently exists in Oregon, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is a similar concept in that it builds public-private partnerships and investments to implement mission-driven work at a landscape scale.

Senate Bill 1515-A would require the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to develop a privately and publicly funded wildfire workforce foundation to achieve forest restoration and wildfire reduction through youth workforce development programs.