

**FIRE SUPPRESSION
FUNDING AND COSTS**

**PROPOSED
SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES**

OCTOBER 2016



STATE OF WASHINGTON
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND
REVIEW COMMITTEE

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Why a JLARC study of DNR and State Fire Marshal fire suppression costs?

In the 2016 Supplemental Operating Budget (2ESHB 2376), the Legislature directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to review funding and costs for fire suppression and state mobilization of fire resources. The study includes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the State Fire Marshal.

DNR fights fires on forest lands it protects and helps other agencies fight fires on their lands

DNR works to contain and extinguish fires on state and privately owned forest lands. It employs both permanent and seasonal staff for these fire suppression efforts. When needed, DNR may contract with other state agencies and private firms for additional staff, equipment, and services. Local fire districts and federal agencies also help fight fires on DNR protected land. DNR may reimburse agencies for this assistance. It also may exchange services by helping other agencies fight fires on lands they protect (e.g., federal forests). DNR also may receive reimbursement for helping other agencies.

State Fire Marshal mobilizes additional fire resources for local fire districts when needed

Local fire districts are generally responsible for suppressing fires on lands that are not owned or managed by DNR or federal agencies. The State Fire Marshal can mobilize additional resources when local fire districts and their firefighting partners are unable to suppress a fire on their own. This is called state fire resource mobilization.

If a local fire chief requests and receives approval for additional aid, the State Fire Marshal coordinates the deployment of firefighters and other resources from local, state, and federal agencies. The State Fire Marshal also sets up an Incident Management Team to manage firefighting efforts, and reimburses responding agencies with state disaster response funds.

State funds fire suppression in operating and supplemental budgets

The Legislature appropriates funds for DNR fire suppression and state fire mobilization efforts from the state's general fund, the disaster response account, and the budget stabilization account. Supplemental funding is routinely needed after each fire season to cover expenditures that exceed initial funding.

Study scope

As directed, this study will focus on fire suppression costs and funding. JLARC staff will analyze DNR's and the State Fire Marshal's processes for estimating costs, tracking and allocating expenditures, and seeking reimbursement. The study will not assess decisions about how to suppress fires, the cost of recovery after a fire, or the impact of fire prevention efforts on suppression costs.

Study objectives

This study will address the following questions:

- 1) How does the state estimate costs and fund fire suppression activities and fire resource mobilization efforts?
- 2) What are the types of fire suppression costs, and how are the costs for individual fires determined?
- 3) What resources are used and shared to suppress fires? How do DNR and the State Fire Marshal manage cost sharing agreements, determine the state's share, and secure reimbursement?
- 4) How do the following characteristics influence fire suppression costs or reimbursement?
 - a. State, federal, and private land ownership (including land with private fire insurance)
 - b. Whether land is developed or undeveloped

Timeframe for the study

Staff will present the preliminary report in December 2017 and the final report in January 2018.

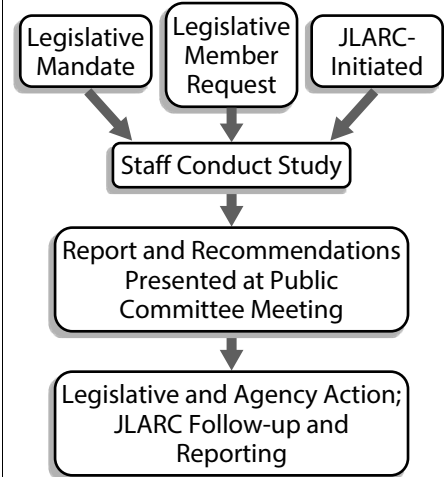
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Related JLARC Study

JLARC staff are conducting a separate study of forest fire protection assessments. These fees are collected by DNR for fire prevention and preparedness, not suppression. The preliminary report for that study is due July 2017.

JLARC Study Process



Criteria for Establishing JLARC Work Program Priorities

- Is study consistent with JLARC mission? Is it mandated?
- Is this an area of significant fiscal or program impact, a major policy issue facing the state, or otherwise of compelling public interest?
- Will there likely be substantive findings and recommendations?
- Is this the best use of JLARC resources? For example:
 - Is JLARC the most appropriate agency to perform the work?
 - Would the study be nonduplicating?
 - Would this study be cost-effective compared to other projects (e.g., larger, more substantive studies take longer and cost more, but might also yield more useful results)?
- Is funding available to carry out the project?