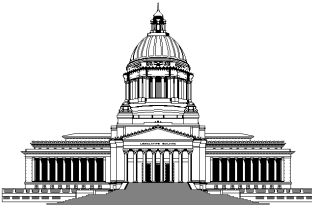


# FEES ASSESSED FOR FOREST FIRE PROTECTION

## PROPOSED SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

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STATE OF WASHINGTON  
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND  
REVIEW COMMITTEE

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## Why a JLARC Study of Fees Assessed for Forest Fire Protection?

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the lead agency for fire protection and suppression on non-federal forest land.

By law, all forest landowners in the state must provide adequate protection against the spread of fire on their land. If a landowner does not provide adequate protection, then DNR must provide the protection. DNR imposes Forest Fire Protection Assessment fees, which support protection activities (Chapter 76.04 RCW).

The Legislature established these assessments in 1983. The most recent revision to the fee structure was in 2007. The 2015-17 Operating Budget (ESSB 6052) directs the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to review the assessments.

## Assessments Pay for Fire Prevention and Preparedness, Not Suppression

DNR uses the assessment funds for activities allowed in statute:

- **Fire Prevention** such as fuel treatments, public education, and issuing burn permits.
- **Fire Preparedness** such as providing training, purchasing equipment, and positioning resources near fire areas.

Assessment funds do not pay for fire suppression.

## How are the Assessments Calculated?

Landowners, including state agencies and tax-exempt entities, pay the assessment for each covered parcel of forest land.

Forest lands subject to the assessment are unimproved and have enough trees or other flammable material to pose a fire hazard to life or property. Areas of sagebrush and grass in eastern Washington may be considered forest lands if they are adjacent to or intermingled with trees. Forest land excludes portions of parcels that are developed.

The amount of the assessment is set in statute. Some landowners may be eligible for a partial refund.

Parcels under 50 acres	Parcels over 50 acres
\$17.50 flat rate	\$17.50 flat rate plus \$0.27 per acre on each acre over 50

County governments collect the fees for DNR and receive 50 cents per parcel for administration. DNR assessment revenues averaged \$9.4 million annually during the last decade.

## Study Scope

As directed by the Legislature, this study will analyze DNR's Fire Protection Assessments.

The report will review how DNR and counties collect the assessments, including whether the processes are efficient and consistent with statute. JLARC staff also will review how DNR and local fire districts define their fire protection areas.

The report will review assessment rates and identify the practices used by other states for assessments and the standards used for rate setting.

The study excludes practices and expenditures related to fire suppression.

## Study Objectives

This study will address the following questions:

1. How do DNR and local jurisdictions apply assessments, and is the approach consistent with statute?
2. How do DNR and local jurisdictions identify covered parcels, including those that become developed?
3. What parcels are not charged the assessment and not taxed by a local fire district? Where are these parcels located relative to DNR-protected areas?
4. How have the assessment rates and protection expenditures changed over time?
5. How do protection expenditures and deployments compare with where assessments are collected?
6. What can be learned from practices in other states and accepted standards for rate setting?

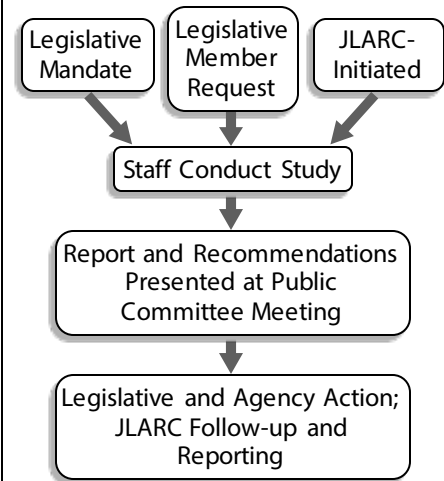
## Timeframe for the Study

Staff will present the preliminary report in July 2017 and the final report in September 2017.

## JLARC Staff Contact for the Study

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### 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?