

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

RS29124 / H0588

This legislation would allow the Idaho Department of Lands to provide Hazard Differential Pay for department Wildland Firefighters.

Suppressing wildland fires poses a hazard to the lives, health, and wellbeing of wildland firefighters. This hazardous work involves exposure to flames, smoke, aircraft accidents, and rough remote terrain where the potential for serious injury or death may result. These hazards cannot be totally mitigated.

Wildland firefighters operate in a hazardous environment where they have no control of the environmental conditions around them. Aircraft bucket and retardant drops (from 700 to 10,000 gallons) can be near firefighters. In addition, hazardous driving conditions due to limited visibility, heavy fire personnel traffic, difficult terrain, coupled with firefighter fatigue leads to numerous injuries annually. Other, often unseen hazards of the job of fighting wildland fire include long term exposure to toxic air quality (without the option for breathing apparatus/supplemental oxygen), dehydration, and heat illness which are common and a direct result of heavy physical exertion during prolonged shift assignments (16 hours or more). Additionally, many wildland fires are in remote locations and there may not be readily available medical treatment nearby.

The growing wildland urban interface (WUI) environment also presents a new challenge for wildland firefighters as they are increasingly dealing with panicked, and at times hostile, members of the public. Urban infrastructure (fuel tanks, ammunition storage, power lines, septic tanks, wells, and power lines) all present additional hazards to firefighters.

Additionally, the department competes against surrounding states and the federal government to recruit and retain qualified wildland firefighting personnel. Because other jurisdictions provide their wildland firefighters hazard differential pay equal to twenty-five percent (25%) of hourly rates while engaged in fire suppression activities, the department faces a significant recruitment and retention impediment. This legislation helps protect Idaho's public and private forests and rangeland from wildfire by allowing the department to offer competitive compensation for wildland firefighters, in order to improve firefighter recruitment and retention.

FISCAL NOTE

The estimated annual cost for providing wildland firefighter differential Pay ranges from \$330,000 to \$390,000, which may impact the general fund, dependent upon if department firefighters are deployed to fires under department protection or to areas protected by other jurisdictions.

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DISCLAIMER: This statement of purpose and fiscal note are a mere attachment to this bill and prepared by a proponent of the bill. It is neither intended as an expression of legislative intent nor intended for any use outside of the legislative process, including judicial review (Joint Rule 18).