

BILL ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2914
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Agriculture & Livestock
Committee Report (Substituted)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The wildland urban interface, where subdivisions and businesses meet surrounding forests and fields and the fuel sources they contain, is susceptible to fire risks. A pilot program will allow Texas communities to work with their local volunteer fire departments and apply for grant money to either reduce fuel loads or undertake projects to reduce the fire hazard in such interface areas. These actions will help prevent wildfires in our communities.

C.S.H.B. 2914 authorizes the Texas Forest Service to establish and administer a fuel mitigation pilot grant program to assist with the costs of fuel mitigation. The bill allows the Texas Forest Service to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from public or private sources to help fund this pilot program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Forest Service in SECTION 1 of this bill.

ANALYSIS

C.S.H.B. 2914 adds a temporary provision to the Education Code, set to expire September 1, 2011, to authorize the Texas Forest Service, with the advice of its advisory committee appointed under the rural volunteer fire department insurance program, to establish and administer a pilot program to provide grants to fire departments to assist with the costs of fuel mitigation. The bill requires the Texas Forest Service to adopt rules as necessary to implement the pilot program, including rules establishing reasonable criteria and qualifications for the distribution of grant money under the pilot program and a procedure for reporting and processing requests for grant money under the pilot program.

C.S.H.B. 2914 authorizes the Texas Forest Service to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from any public or private source for purposes the pilot program. The bill requires the director of the Texas Forest Service, if the Texas Forest Service establishes the pilot program, to submit a written report to the legislature not later than December 1, 2010, on the effectiveness of the pilot program in mitigating fuel hazards. The bill authorizes money in the rural volunteer fire department insurance fund, notwithstanding restrictions on that fund, to be used for purposes of the pilot program.

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the act does not receive the necessary vote, the act takes effect September 1, 2009.

COMPARISON OF ORIGINAL AND SUBSTITUTE

C.S.H.B. 2914 authorizes the Texas Forest Service to establish and administer a pilot program, rather than requiring the Texas Forest Service to administer a pilot program as in the original.

C.S.H.B. 2914 differs from the original by requiring the report on the pilot program by the director of the Texas Forest Service to be submitted to the legislature only if the Texas Forest Service establishes a pilot program.

C.S.H.B. 2914 removes a provision from the original requiring the director of the Texas Forest Service to adopt rules for the administration of the fuel mitigation pilot grant program as soon as practicable after the effective date of the original.