Environment Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1378
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING WILDFIRE RESPONSE AND MANAGEMENT.
Vote Date: 3/14/2025
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations
PH Date: 3/3/2025
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Environment Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill was introduced because of the unprecedented statewide wildfire emergency during October-November 2024. It will improve the DEEP's and municipal fire department's abilities to respond to wildfires.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
DEEP supports HB 1378 but has concerns with Section 1 and 2 because it would require resources that are not included in the Governor's budget. These sections would require reports "wildlife risk assessments" which are often conducted by outside contractors and can be costly to produce. Section 3 makes it clear in statutory text that DEEP has the authority to prohibit open burning on its State-managed lands. Section 4 allows DEEP to extend the deadline for volunteer fire department to submit reimbursement requests for wildfire-fighting expenses. Section 5 splits the Governor's authority into two parts. Simply banning open burning without requiring a full forest closure or instead close the parks without banning open burning.

Ronnella A. Higgins, Commissioner, Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection
The Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection has 2 divisions that deal with wildfires. The Commission on Fire Prevention and Control and the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security. They support HB 1378 but recognizes that Section 2 will require additional financial resources to DEEP to provide training for firefighters. If the bill is awarded additional money, The Department request that they be added as a partner in developing training.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Ruth Canovi, Director, Advocacy, American Lung Association, CT

The American Lung Association supports all efforts to control wildfires in the state of Connecticut. Wildlife smoke is dangerous, and they would encourage coordination with the Public Health Departments on the state and local level. They are also open to partnering on wildfire work in the state.

Julianna Larue, Organizer, Sierra Club Connecticut

The Sierra Clubs number one focus is protecting the lives, property, and Connecticut's natural landscape. They believe that this bill will enhance the state's ability to respond to and manage wildfires.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Judy Ganswindt **Date: March 19, 2025**