

ASSEMBLY, No. 5431

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

221st LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 10, 2025

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman DAWN FANTASIA
District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblyman Azzariti Jr.

SYNOPSIS

Establishes Forest Fire Preparedness Commission in DEP.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/24/2025)

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2

1 AN ACT establishing a Forest Fire Preparedness Commission in the
2 Department of Environmental Protection.

3

4 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
5 of New Jersey:

6

7 1. a. There is established, in the Department of Environmental
8 Protection, the "Forest Fire Preparedness Commission."

9 b. The commission shall consist of 20 members, as follows:

10 (1) the Commissioner of Environmental Protection, ex officio, or
11 the commissioner's designee, who shall serve as chairperson;

12 (2) the State Firewarden appointed pursuant to R.S.13:9-7, ex
13 officio, or the State Firewarden's designee;

14 (3) the three division forest firewardens appointed pursuant to
15 R.S.13:9-7, ex officio, or the firewardens' designees;

16 (4) the Director of the Division of Fire Safety in the Department
17 of Community Affairs, or the director's designee;

18 (5) the New Jersey State Police Superintendent, ex officio, or the
19 superintendent's designee;

20 (6) the Director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, ex officio,
21 or the director's designee; and

22 (7) 12 members appointed by the Commissioner of
23 Environmental Protection no later than 60 days after the effective
24 date of this act, including:

25 (a) three district forest firewardens employed by the State Forest
26 Fire Service;

27 (b) one member of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning
28 Council established pursuant to section 4 of P.L.2004, c.120
29 (C.13:20-4);

30 (c) one member of the Pinelands commission established
31 pursuant to section 4 of P.L.1979, c.11 (C.13:18A-4);

32 (d) one member of the Fish and Game Council;

33 (e) one officer of the New Jersey Forestry Association;

34 (f) four members of State, regional, county, or municipal
35 firefighting or other emergency response organizations; and

36 (g) one member of the public with knowledge or experience in
37 managing woodlands.

38 c. The Forest Fire Preparedness Commission shall hold its initial
39 meeting as soon as practicable, but no later than 90 days after the
40 effective date of this act. The commission shall meet no less than
41 six times per year at such places and times as the chairperson may
42 designate. The commission shall hold a minimum of two annual
43 public hearings. The chairperson may appoint a secretary who need
44 not be a member of the commission. A majority of the membership
45 of the commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of
46 commission business.

47 d. The Forest Fire Preparedness Commission shall meet with
48 key stakeholders, advocates, and experts, and shall consult with

1 policy experts in firefighting, forest fire mitigation techniques,
2 forest stewardship, emergency response, environmental science, or
3 other applicable fields.

4 e. The Department of Environmental Protection shall provide
5 professional, stenographic, and clerical staff to the commission, as
6 may be necessary for the Forest Fire Preparedness Commission to
7 carry out its duties. The commission shall also be entitled to call
8 upon the services of any State, county, or municipal department,
9 board, commission, or agency, as may be available to it for its
10 purposes.

11 f. The duties of the Forest Fire Preparedness Commission shall
12 be to carry out an audit of the State's readiness to prevent, mitigate,
13 and respond to wildfires, and to establish protocols to ensure that
14 municipal, county, regional, and State emergency response
15 organizations, including police, firefighting, and medical
16 responders, communicate regularly and effectively so that they
17 carry out a coordinated and effective response to any wildfires in
18 the State. To carry out these duties, the commission shall:

19 (1) review the existing the State forest fire plan prepared
20 pursuant to P.L.1955, c.224 (C.32:24-1 et seq.);

21 (2) review the provisions of the Middle Atlantic Interstate Forest
22 Fire Protection Compact entered into pursuant to P.L.1955, c.224
23 (C.32:24-1 et seq.);

24 (3) review any relevant local or regional forest management
25 plans or fire prevention plans;

26 (4) conduct an audit of the current readiness of the State to
27 prevent, mitigate, and respond to wildfires, with particular attention
28 paid to areas that have the potential to threaten lives and property,
29 and including an assessment of the efficacy of the use of controlled
30 burns in the State;

31 (5) provide recommendations to the Governor and to the
32 Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1)
33 regarding changes to State protocols, regulations, and laws that
34 would increase the State's ability to prevent, mitigate, and respond
35 to wildfires;

36 (6) develop a comprehensive roadmap to be utilized by State,
37 regional, county, and local emergency responders, including
38 firefighters, police, and medical responders, in order to coordinate
39 their responses to wildfires; and

40 (7) develop standardized lines of communication among the
41 State Forest Fire Service and State, regional, county, and municipal
42 emergency response organizations for the purposes of wildfire
43 response;

44 (8) review and update, if necessary, evacuation protocols during
45 wildfire emergencies; and

46 (9) develop a plan by which firefighting planes and helicopters
47 can ensure access to a constant supply of suitable water to be used
48 for firefighting purposes.

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1 g. No later than two years after the effective date of this act, the
2 Forest Fire Preparedness Commission shall submit a final report to
3 the Governor and, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164
4 (C.52:14-19.1), to the Legislature on the findings, plans,
5 recommendations, and activities of the commission, including a
6 copy of the final response roadmap developed pursuant to
7 paragraph (6) of subsection f. of this section and a summary of the
8 standardized lines of communication developed pursuant to
9 paragraph (7) of subsection f. of this section.

10 h. The Forest Fire Preparedness Commission shall be dissolved
11 30 days after it produces the report required pursuant to subsection
12 g. of this section.

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14 2. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire 30 days
15 after the Forest Fire Preparedness Commission produces the report
16 required pursuant to subsection g. of section 1 of this act.

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19 STATEMENT

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21 This bill would establish a "Forest Fire Preparedness
22 Commission" in the Department of Environmental Protection.

23 The commission would be composed of 20 members, including
24 the Commissioner of Environmental Protection, the State
25 Firewarden, and the Superintendent of the State Police, or their
26 designees, and representatives of local emergency response
27 organizations. The commission would be charged with various
28 duties related to ensuring that the State is prepared to respond in a
29 timely and effective manner to wildfires, including:

30 (1) performing a comprehensive audit of the State's current
31 protocols related to wildfire response;

32 (2) developing a comprehensive roadmap that may be utilized by
33 State, regional, county, and local emergency responders, including
34 firefighters, police, and medical responders, in order to coordinate
35 their responses to wildfires; and

36 (3) developing standardized lines of communication among the
37 State Forest Fire Service and State, regional, county, and municipal
38 emergency response organizations for the purposes of wildfire
39 response.

40 The bill would require the commission to produce a report that
41 produces its findings, plans, recommendations, and activities no
42 later than two years after the bill's enactment, after which the Forest
43 Fire Preparedness Commission would dissolve.