

Goldmark appeals for full fire funding

Reduced amount in House budget; final plan not set

The Chronicle

OLYMPIA – The state House is on track to appropriate funding for firefighting, mapping of geologic hazards and oversight of timber harvest applications near unstable slopes, but the amounts are less than requested by Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark.

He appealed to the House Appropriations Committee for full funding of his resource requests, but the House version of the budget that passed Friday includes several million dollars less than requested.

The House budget still must be reconciled with the Senate version.

“More natural disasters are inevitable,” Goldmark said. “I am asking the Legislature for the basic resources to be able to respond.”

The budget includes \$2.5 million of the state Department of Natural Resources’ original request for about \$4.5 million to bolster fire crews, add equipment and expand aerial firefighting capability in the wake of the 2014 fire season, the worst in state history.

It also includes \$4.6 million of the agency’s \$6.6 million request to expand LiDAR mapping of the state’s geologic hazards, in the wake of the Oso slide, and \$700,000 of the \$3.2 million the agency needs to expand oversight of timber harvest applications near unstable slopes.

“The latest weather models are showing a strong probability of another hot summer, particularly in western Washington,” Goldmark told lawmakers last week. “We need more firefighters and equipment to be able to prepare for an increased chance of wildfire on both sides of the Cascades.”

In the wake of the Oso-state Highway 530 landslide, Natural Resources officials want to map areas of greatest potential for geologic hazards, with special focus on population centers and critical infrastructure. The



Washington State Legislative Services

Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark addresses a House committee last week.

Wildfire meetings planned

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TWISP – Wildfire preparedness meetings are planned later this month in Twisp and Okanogan by the state Department of Natural Resources.

Conditions are ripe for another active season of wildfires, and the meetings are aimed at helping residents of fire-prone areas think ahead and prepare, the department said.

Natural Resources officials will share weather predictions and explain how to protect homes, property and communities. Residents will be able to ask questions and get information about grants to

help clear vegetation and trees to reduce fire hazards, how to sign up as a wildfire contractor and how to be trained in wildfire safety basics.

Representatives from local fire districts, local law enforcement, federal agencies, conservation districts and other agencies also will participate.

Meetings are set for 6:30 p.m. April 22 at the Methow Valley Community Center, 201 E. Methow Valley Highway, Twisp., and 6:30 p.m. April 23 at the Okanogan County Fairgrounds, 175 Rodeo Trail Road, Okanogan.

Similar meetings are planned April 30 in Lyle, May 7 in Wenatchee, May 14 in Colville and May 21 in Yakima.

original request also proposes to help residents, developers and planners understand the complex geology that indicates potential for landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic mudflow.

Since recession budget cuts, Natural Resources has had only 45 foresters to review more than 6,000 new timber harvest applications submitted each year, in addition to the 10,000 already-approved applications that require compliance checks, Goldmark said.

New state regulations enacted in 2015 will add to the load, requiring extra layers of geologic scrutiny on timber harvests that would take place

on or near potentially unstable slopes, he said.

The agency hopes to add more field staff and geologists who can give more attention to sensitive sites before and while timber is being harvested.

