

Bill: 3rd substitute HB 48 – Wildland Urban Interface Modifications

Sponsor: Representative Casey Snider

Floor Sponsor: Senator Michael K. McKell

UASD Position: Support

This Bill addresses efforts to oversee wildfire risks associated with wildland urban interface property.

Discussion: Representative Snider spoke about the 3rd substitute, which the Committee adopted. He explained that this substitute changes the date on which a county officer must assess an annual fee against a property owner of high-risk wildland urban interface (“WUI”) property within the incorporated and unincorporated portions of the county to January 1, 2026. The sponsor noted a discrepancy between what is observed on the ground and what appears in datasets when identifying the WUI. Some systems indicate significant inconsistencies in defining the WUI. The first part of this Bill is intended to refine the mapping system. The second part addresses structures within the WUI and how homeowners can mitigate risk. The sponsor explained that under this Bill, homeowners in high-risk wildfire areas would pay an annual assessment fee. This fee would support on the ground assessments and help homeowners understand how to make their properties more resilient against wildfires. Once a homeowner implements fire safety measures, their home could be officially designated as fire safe within the WUI. With this designation, they could present proof to their insurance companies, potentially reducing their premiums. The sponsor further explained that if a county fire warden collaborates with the state on fire mitigation assessments, those efforts would count toward the county’s mitigation match requirements.

Senator Sandall asked whether the fee for these assessments would largely offset insurance costs and whether mitigation efforts would lead to lower premiums, despite concerns about higher property taxes. The sponsor acknowledged that this had been considered while drafting the Bill. While a direct cost offset wasn’t guaranteed, he expected that certification as fire safe would help lower premiums. Senator Stratton requested an update on counties adopting building codes consistent with WUI standards. The sponsor confirmed that counties are already working on this, with further updates to the WUI portion of the Code expected soon. Senator Stratton then asked whether the legislature would need to take action if these updates required counties to formally adopt the changes. The sponsor responded that it would be required, but he does not anticipate delays as most structures already comply. The Utah Home Builders Association and the Utah State Fire Chiefs Association spoke in support of the Bill.

Yeas: 4

Nays: 0

N/V: 3

Outcome: 3rd substitute HB 48 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: 1st Substitute HB 85 – Environmental Permitting Modifications

Sponsor: Representative Tyler Clancy

Floor Sponsor: Senator Ronald M. Winterton

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill addresses provisions related to environmental permitting.

Discussion: HB 85 requires the Department of Environmental Quality to study two options for expedited permitting: permit by rule and a "plant-wide applicability limit". Representative Clancy explained that neither of these permit types reduces air quality or environmental standards; they are simply best practices for permitting processes. The sponsor believes that clarifying the types of permits can save both regulatory and industry time. Representative Clancy further explained the concept of a plant-wide applicability limit, describing it as a framework that eliminates the need for a new source review. This change would prevent minor modifications in a factory from requiring a full re-permitting process, which is currently the case. Senator Blouin inquired about how the Bill aligns with state implementation plans, and the sponsor responded that the Governor's recent executive order facilitates the implementation of the Bill. The Bill initially selects five industries for expedited permitting, though not all will have a permit-by-rule option. Instead, these industries will be consulted for their expertise on appropriate permit standards. Senator Blouin stated that he would vote against the Bill unless the section addressing gravel pits is removed. No public comments were made.

Yeas: 2

Nays: 1

N/V: 4

Outcome: 1st Substitute 85 was favorably recommended to the Senate.

Bill: 2nd Substitute HB 201 – Energy Resource Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Colin W. Jack

Floor Sponsor: Senator Ronald M. Winterton

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill modifies provisions related to the evaluation of integrated resource plans by the Public Service Commission.

Discussion: Representative Jack presented the 2nd Substitute of HB 201, which was adopted by the Committee. The 2nd Substitute clarifies that the Bill does not imply customers are exempt from paying their power bills. It also clarifies that, when reviewing integrated resource plans, the focus is not only on capacity but also on the "potential plant factor", which refers to the ability to generate energy at full capacity. The Bill ensures that all resources are accurately accounted for to maintain affordable and reliable energy. It emphasizes the need for energy demands to be properly considered in projected loads, rather than just the projected resources. The sponsor explained that the Bill will increase transparency in energy pricing and improve generation capacity calculations by ensuring utilities align their energy generation rates with demand loads.

The goal is to maintain an efficient load factor and balance energy supply with demand to keep costs affordable.

Senator Hinkins raised a concern about power outages in other states and asked if the Bill aims to prevent such issues. The sponsor confirmed that the Bill seeks to prevent these problems, explaining that outages lasting less than five minutes do not count, but they still cause loads to drop off. Senator Blouin asked how the Bill differs from integration costs already implemented in Utah. The sponsor clarified that the Bill mandates that integration and firming costs be attributed to specific resources, ensuring utility companies do not use resources inefficiently. Senator Blouin also inquired about how the Bill addresses potential future outages in natural gas and coal supplies. The sponsor referred to the issues Texas faced and assured that utilities will be managed to prevent such mismanagement. Senator Blouin further questioned how the Bill addresses storage and whether wind and solar resources will be categorized separately or together. The sponsor responded that the Bill is designed to avoid favoring one energy source over another and ensures that energy stored is not "double-counted", which could result in miscalculations of load and resources.

The Utah Association of Energy Users expressed support for the 2nd Substitute, while the Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club voiced opposition to the Bill.

Yeas: 3

Nays: 1

N/V: 3

Outcome: 2nd Substitute HB 201 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.
