

RCW 70A.65.005 Findings—Intent. (1) The legislature finds that climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing our state and the world today, an existential crisis with major negative impacts on environmental and human health. Washington is experiencing environmental and community impacts due to climate change through increasingly devastating wildfires, flooding, droughts, rising temperatures and sea levels, and ocean acidification. Greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere will increase impacts for some period of time. Actions to increase resilience of our communities, natural resource lands, and ecosystems can prevent and reduce impacts to communities and our environment and improve their ability to recover.

(2) In 2020, the legislature updated the state's greenhouse gas emissions limits that are to be achieved by 2030, 2040, and 2050, based on current science and emissions trends, to support local and global efforts to avoid the most significant impacts from climate change. Meeting these limits will require coordinated, comprehensive, and multisectoral implementation of policies, programs, and laws, as other enacted policies are insufficient to meet the limits.

(3) The legislature further finds that while climate change is a global problem, there are communities that have historically borne the disproportionate impacts of environmental burdens and that now bear the disproportionate negative impacts of climate change. Although the state has done significant work in the past to highlight these environmental health disparities, beginning with senator Rosa Franklin's environmental equity study, and continuing through the work of the governor's interagency council on health disparities, the creation of the Washington environmental health disparities map, and recommendations of the environmental justice task force, the state can do much more to ensure that state programs address environmental equity.

(4) The legislature further finds that while enacted carbon policies can be well-intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide environmental benefits to communities, the policies may not do enough to ensure environmental health disparities are reduced and environmental benefits are provided to those communities most impacted by environmental harms from greenhouse gas and air pollutant emissions.

(5) The legislature further finds that wildfires have become one of the largest sources of black carbon in the last five years. From 2014 through 2018, wildfires in Washington state generated 39,200,000 metric tons of carbon, the equivalent of more than 8,500,000 cars on the road a year. In 2015, when 1,130,000 acres burned in Washington, wildfires were the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions releasing 17,975,112 metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Wildfire pollution affects all Washingtonians, but has disproportionate health effects on low-income communities, communities of color, and the most vulnerable of our population. Restoring the health of our forests and investing in wildfire prevention and preparedness will therefore contribute to improved air quality and improved public health outcomes.

(6) The legislature further finds that by exercising a leadership role in addressing climate change, Washington will position its economy, technology centers, financial institutions, and manufacturers to benefit from national and international efforts that must occur to reduce greenhouse gases. The legislature intends to create climate

policy that recognizes the special nature of emissions-intensive, trade-exposed industries by minimizing leakage and increased life-cycle emissions associated with product imports. The legislature further finds that climate policies must be appropriately designed, in order to avoid leakage that results in net increases in global greenhouse gas emissions and increased negative impacts to those communities most impacted by environmental harms from climate change. The legislature further intends to encourage these industries to continue to innovate, find new ways to be more energy efficient, use lower carbon products, and be positioned to be global leaders in a low carbon economy.

(7) Under the program, the legislature intends to identify overburdened communities where the highest concentrations of criteria pollutants occur, determine the sources of those emissions and pollutants, and pursue significant reductions of emissions and pollutants in those communities. The legislature further intends for the department of ecology to conduct environmental justice assessments to ensure that funds and programs created under this chapter provide direct and meaningful benefits to vulnerable populations and overburdened communities. Additionally, the legislature intends to prevent job loss and provide protective measures if workers are adversely impacted by the transition to a clean energy economy through transition and assistance programs, worker-support projects, and workforce development and other activities designed to grow and expand the clean manufacturing sector in communities across Washington state. The legislature further intends to empower the environmental justice council established under RCW 70A.02.110 to provide recommendations for the development and implementation of the program, the distribution of funds, and the establishment of programs, activities, and projects to achieve environmental justice and environmental health goals. The legislature further intends for the department of ecology to create and adopt community engagement plans and tribal consultation frameworks in the administration of the program to ensure equitable practices for meaningful community and federally recognized tribal involvement. Finally, the legislature intends to establish this program to contribute to a healthy environment for all of Washington's communities. [2021 c 316 s 1.]