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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5873**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Hawkins and Van De Wege)

AN ACT Relating to establishing a community forests pilot project; adding a new chapter to Title 79 RCW; and providing expiration dates.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that:

(a) Rural lands and communities are important to Washington's economy, its people, and its environment, and rural-based economies enhance the economic desirability of the state, help to preserve traditional economic activities, and contribute to the state's overall quality of life.

(b) Rural communities of diverse types and sizes rely on the many benefits that forests provide, including forest-based economies, forest products, clean air and water, cultural traditions, recreation, climate resilience, wildlife habitat, and important opportunities for experiential learning and education.

(c) The beneficial relationships between local communities and forests are at risk, including from changes in ownership, management, or land use that have a detrimental impact on the economic condition, public health, recreational activities, or cultural heritage of a community.

(2) It is therefore the policy of the state to establish a pilot program to fund community forest projects to empower local communities to establish community forests by acquiring land and managing them as forestland for community benefits and demonstrate the feasibility of establishing an ongoing competitive grant program.

(3) This section expires June 30, 2025.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Acquisition" means the purchase on a willing seller basis of a fee simple or less than fee simple interest in real property. A less than fee simple interest in real property includes, but is not limited to, options, rights of first refusal, conservation easements, leases, timber rights, mineral rights, and water rights.

(2) "Community forest management plan" means a tract-specific plan developed with community involvement that guides the management and use of a community forest and includes the following components:

(a) A description of all land tracts, including acreage and county location, tax assessment, land use, forest type, and vegetation cover;

(b) Objectives for the community forest and strategies to implement those objectives;

(c) A description of the long-term use and management of the property;

(d) Community benefits to be achieved from the establishment of the community forest;

(e) The role of a community forest in meeting goals of local land use plan, watershed plan, or habitat conservation plan;

(f) A description of planned timber harvests subject to the state forest practices act according to chapter 76.09 RCW;

(g) A description of ongoing activities that promote community involvement in the development and implementation of the community forest management plan;

(h) Plans for the utilization or demolition of existing structures and proposed needs for further improvements;

(i) A description of public access and the rationale for any limitations on public access, such as protection of cultural or natural resources or public health and safety concerns;

(j) Maps of sufficient scale to show the location of the property in relation to roads, communities, and other improvements as well as nearby parks, refuges, or other protected lands and any additional maps required to display planned management activities; and

(k) A proposed operations plan that shows that the community forest project is at least capable of generating revenue at levels that are, in the long-term and taking into consideration philanthropic donations and endowments, capable of reimbursing management costs.

(3) "Department" means the department of natural resources.

(4) "Sponsor" includes state agencies, local agencies, tribes, and qualified nonprofit organizations that are permitted to apply for funds for the acquisition and development of community forests under this pilot program.

(5) This section expires June 30, 2025.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The department shall, subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, establish a pilot community forest program that includes the highest scoring projects from the prioritized list of nonstate owned community forest projects developed pursuant to section 3063, chapter 298, Laws of 2018.

(2) To the extent deemed necessary by the department, additional nonstate owned community forest may be included in this pilot program in subsequent biennia for acquisition funding or reporting purposes useful for informing the creation of a competitive grant program. The department shall develop procedures for the inclusion of additional projects in this pilot program.

(3) In the case of any proposed expansion of the pilot program to include additional projects, the department shall confer with the county or city with jurisdiction over the project area as well as local stakeholders prior to seeking funds for the acquisition of property under this pilot program.

(4) All land acquired under this pilot program with funding from the account must be by a voluntary transaction. Eligible applicants must engage in a fair and transparent consultation with the existing landowner in land acquisition negotiations, including a landowner acknowledgment of a state funding request to support acquisition goals to be considered in the application process.

(5) At a minimum, a sponsor must provide at least fifteen percent matching funds.

(6) The projects supported under the community forest pilot program must be managed consistent with the following community forest principles:

(a) A community forest is owned and managed by or on behalf of a local community;

(b) The governance structure of a community forest ensures collaboration and community participation in, and responsibility for, management decisions and the allocation of revenue generated from the forest;

(c) The community has secure and reliable access to the values and benefits of the forest;

(d) The forest is managed in accordance with a community forest management plan; and

(e) The conservation values of the forest ecosystem are protected and incorporated into a community forest management plan.

(7) The types of benefits that may accrue to a community from a community forest include, but are not limited to, the following: Economic benefits from timber and nontimber jobs; clean air and water; forest-based experiential learning; stewardship support to other small forest landowners; wildlife habitat; and recreation and culturally important activities.

(8) It is presumed that community forests serve the public interest if they have been established through an inclusive, collaborative process, and are managed in accordance with the community forest principles and other requirements of this pilot program. For any project awarded funding under this pilot program, a deed of right must convey to the people of the state of Washington the rights to preserve, protect, and use the property for public purposes consistent with this pilot program. Any action or inaction inconsistent with this deed of right must be treated as a conversion subject to the rules and procedures developed by the department pursuant to subsection (9) of this section.

(9) Property or property interests acquired under this pilot may not, without prior approval of the department, be converted to a use other than that for which funds were originally approved. The department shall adopt procedures governing the approval of such a conversion.

(10) Any revenue produced from property funded by this pilot program must be retained and reinvested locally and allocated as follows:

(a) In support of the property management objectives identified in the community forest management plan;

(b) In support of other activities that generate or reinforce one or more of the community benefits identified in this section; and

(c) In furtherance of other activities having a direct benefit to local communities and the general public.

(11) This section expires June 30, 2025.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The department must, consistent with RCW 43.01.036, submit a biannual report to the legislature for the duration of the pilot program. The first report is due October 31, 2020. The reports must summarize the outcomes of the community forest pilot program created under this chapter.

(2) The report required under this section must at least include:

(a) A breakdown of the number of the total acreage, types of grantees, and preacquisition status, additional fund-raising support and use of land purchased under this pilot program;

(b) Total or expected revenue derived from each community forest, total timber harvest excise taxes paid by each community forest, and nontimber revenues and general use of revenues;

(c) Other economic and public benefits considerations, the retention forests, forest health treatments, access to recreation space, jobs supported, enterprise development, and other community wealth building activities that result from community forest activities; and

(d) Recommendations for developing an ongoing competitive community forest grant program.

(3) This section expires June 30, 2025.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 4 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 79 RCW.

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