

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1368

As Passed House:

March 10, 1999

Title: An act relating to the use of revenues under the county conservation futures levy.

Brief Description: Prescribing the use of revenues under the county conservation futures levy.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Local Government (Originally sponsored by Representatives Alexander, Wolfe, DeBolt and Romero).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 2/4/99, 3/1/99 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/10/99, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes counties to use conservation futures funds to develop, maintain and operate property acquired with conservation futures funds.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Mulliken, Republican Co-Chair; Scott, Democratic Co-Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; Mielke, Republican Vice Chair; Edwards; Ericksen; Fisher and Fortunato.

Staff: Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).

Background:

Local governments and certain public and private entities are authorized to acquire the title to or other interests in land for the purposes of protecting, improving, restoring, maintaining or conserving certain open space, farm or agricultural, and timber land for public use or enjoyment. The entities authorized to make these acquisitions include

counties, cities, towns, metropolitan park districts, metropolitan municipal corporations, nonprofit historic preservation corporations, and nonprofit nature conservancy corporations or associations. These entities are specifically authorized to acquire development rights in certain open space, farm or agricultural, and timber land (conservation futures) for conservation purposes. The statutes authorizing these acquisitions include some general provisions on future uses of property acquired for these purposes.

To fund these acquisitions, counties may impose a property tax levy against the assessed valuation of all taxable property in the county. Twelve counties imposed the conservation futures levy in 1998: Clark, Ferry, Island, King, Kitsap, Pierce, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston and Whatcom. The property tax levy amount may be no greater than \$0.0625 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The levy revenues may be placed in a "conservation futures fund," which may only be used to acquire rights and interests in real property.

Summary of Bill:

In addition to acquisition of rights or interests in real property, counties may use the conservation futures levy funds to develop, maintain and operate real property acquired with conservation futures funds.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (Original bill) Counties now cannot use conservation futures levy funds to operate and maintain their property, as the only authorized purpose is acquisition. Counties need to focus on operating and maintaining property before future acquisition. This bill gives more flexibility in operating parks, trails and recreation systems.

Thurston County has used its conservation futures levy to acquire more than 700 acres of park and trail lands and to purchase development rights to more than 900 acres of farmland. Thurston County cannot afford to develop the properties it now owns. This bill provides a great benefit for the public use of these lands.

(In support with concerns) (Original bill) While flexibility to ensure greater utilization of conservation lands is a good idea, the bill as drafted would permit all funds to be used for maintenance. The bill should include criteria or percentages to ensure that funds remain available for acquisition.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Alexander, prime sponsor; Diane Oberquall, Thurston County Commissioner; and Mark Lovrien, private citizen.

(In support with concerns) Josh Baldi, Washington Environmental Council.