

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HB 1778

Title: An act relating to providing grants for urban and community forestry projects.

Brief Description: Providing grants for urban and community forestry projects.

Sponsors: Representatives Regala, Anderson, Buck, Doumit, G. Chandler, Poulsen, Cooper, McMorris, Parlette, Tokuda, McDonald, Mastin, Linville, Stensen, Lantz, Lovick, Ogden, Veloria, Rockefeller, Kagi, Edwards, Kenney, McIntire, Keiser, Murray, Quall, Fisher, Cody, Romero, Conway, Santos, Haigh, Constantine and Kessler.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Meeting Date: February 17, 1999

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Josh Weiss, Counsel (786-7129)

Background: A study released in July of 1998 by American Forests, a nonprofit conservation organization, found that areas in the Puget Sound region with high vegetation and tree canopy coverage have declined by 37 percent since 1972. This is a loss of over half a millions acres of tree coverage in 2 1/2 decades. The study also found that the results of such tree loss would equate to a 29 percent increase in storm water runoff during peak storm events. Replacing this lost storm water retention capacity with reservoirs and other structural systems would cost an estimated \$2.4 billion. In addition, this lost tree canopy would have removed about 35 million pounds of pollutants from the atmosphere annually. The value of such air quality improvements was estimated at \$95 million.

The United States government has funded urban and community forestry projects at the state level for a number of years. Many western states, including Washington, have taken advantage of this opportunity by authorizing state urban and community forestry departments within state agencies.

Current statute allows the Department of Natural Resources to establish and maintain a community and urban forestry program. In addition, the department is allowed to assist municipalities and counties in establishing and maintaining community and urban forestry programs. The department currently provides grants to local projects related to urban and community forestry, but this is funded entirely by federal moneys. The department provides approximately \$75,000 a year in grants.

In addition, the Department of Natural Resources is allowed to appoint a committee or council to advise the department in establishing and carrying out a community and urban forestry program. Establishing such a committee is a requirement of receiving federal community and urban forestry moneys. The department has appointed the Washington Community Forestry Council, which is composed of 13 members. Members include arborists and other related professionals, individuals appointed at large, one elected official, one representative from a utility, and one representative from business. The council meets about six times per year.

Summary of Bill: Additional legislative findings are made relating to the documented loss of tree cover and vegetation in western Washington, the costs of such loss, the value of urban trees in providing habitat for endangered and threatened species, and the value of trees in enhancing residential and business values. In addition the purposes of the existing urban and community forestry statute are broadened to include the provision of funding for urban and community forestry programs.

Previously, discretionary responsibilities of the Department of Natural Resources relating to the community and urban forestry program, such as establishing and maintaining the program itself and appointing an advisory committee or council, are made mandatory subject to available funding. The committee is allowed to take actions necessary to qualify as a nonprofit corporation under the Internal Revenue code.

The duties of the committee or council are prescribed. These include: taking any actions necessary to secure federal funding, reviewing and making decisions on applications for grants, advising and making recommendations to the Commissioner of Public Lands, providing public education and advocacy for community and urban forestry issues, providing leadership and direction to statewide urban forestry, maintaining a clearing house of information, and advising the Legislature and state residents on the community and urban forests.

The Department of Natural Resources is required to provide grants to local urban and community forestry projects. Only projects which are proposed and managed by municipal, county, or state government or a legally organized nonprofit corporation may receive grant moneys. Additional criteria are established, and include projects which: encourage community and urban forests, assist in implementing regional and local land use planning projects related to urban forestry, prepare urban tree plans, retain native trees and riparian habitats, and address the purposes of the act.

Appropriation: The Department of Natural Resources is appropriated \$200,000 for the biennium from the state general fund.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 8, 1999.

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

Rulemaking Authority: None.