

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5148

As Reported By House Committee On:
Agriculture & Ecology

Title: An act relating to the permit assistance center.

Brief Description: Changing permit assistance center provisions.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Environmental Quality & Water Resources (originally sponsored by Senators B. Sheldon, Morton and Fraser; by request of Department of Ecology).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 3/23/99, 4/2/99 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Reauthorizing the Permit Assistance Center.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 14 members: Representatives G. Chandler, Republican Co-Chair; Linville, Democratic Co-Chair; Cooper, Democratic Vice Chair; Koster, Republican Vice Chair; Anderson; B. Chandler; Delvin; Fortunato; Grant; Reardon; Schoesler; Stensen; Sump and Wood.

Staff: Carole Richmond (786-7114).

Background:

The Permit Assistance Center was established by law within the Department of Ecology in 1995. The center is designed to provide assistance to businesses and public agencies in order to facilitate their compliance with the state's environmental quality laws in an expedited fashion. The center was also mandated to provide a formal process for coordinating environmental permit processes for applicants with complex projects who may use this process at their option and expense. The center currently has a staff of 2.6

FTEs and a biennial budget of \$309,000. The legislation establishing the center includes a sunset clause. Without reauthorization, the center will close on June 30, 1999.

In a sunset review of the center, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee:

- found that the Department of Ecology had complied with the Legislature's intent in establishing the center and in implementing the coordinated permit process;
- made recommendations for improving the center's efficiency and effectiveness including modifying the center's reporting requirements; and
- recommended re-authorizing the center.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The repeal clauses are repealed, allowing the center as established in current law to continue operations. The center reporting requirements are changed from annual to biennial and expanded. The report must include recommendations for streamlining and coordinating environmental permitting. In addition, it must recommend ways to improve public participation in permitting processes and to improve the public's trust and confidence in the permitting process.

The regulatory agencies involved in implementing the center's responsibilities are authorized to enter into cost-reimbursement agreements with project applicants to recover the costs relating to the implementation of other statutory requirements as they relate to permit review, processing, and coordination. The Department of Ecology is also required to prioritize the expenditure of general fund monies allotted to the center to provide a set of services for permit applicants for small projects. Permits agencies are provided the option of assigning work to permanent employees, temporary employees, or technical consultants. A termination clause is added.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The definition of "small project" is removed. Small projects were defined as those projects for which the applicants do not enter into a cost-reimbursement agreement and which are limited by number of permits, number of employees, and completed assessed value.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Complex projects definitely benefit from the Permit Assistance Center. Voluntary cost-reimbursement is a good approach.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Betty Sheldon, prime sponsor; Ron Schultz, Audubon Society; Kevin Raymond, Trendwest Resorts; Jerry Smedes, Stone River Development Corporation and Northwest Business Environmental Business Council; Scott Boettcher, Department of Ecology; Peter Birch, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Rick Jensen, United Infrastructure Company; John Savich, Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development; Peter McMillan, Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development; and Paul Silver, Department of Natural Resources.