

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6400

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines, February 6, 2002

Title: An act relating to biodiversity conservation.

Brief Description: Developing a statewide biodiversity conservation strategy.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen, Oke, Kohl-Welles and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines: 1/17/02, 2/6/02 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS & SHORELINES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6400 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Poulsen, Vice Chair; Hargrove, McDonald, Oke, Snyder and Spanel.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Morton and Stevens.

Staff: Kari Guy (786-7437)

Background: Biological diversity “ or biodiversity “ is the term used to describe the genetic differences within a species, the array of plants and animals, and the diversity of landscapes on which they depend. There are a number of programs in Washington, both state and non-governmental, that address the state’s biodiversity. These programs include the state’s Natural Heritage Program housed in the Department of Natural Resources, and the Priority Habitat and Species program of the Department of Fish and Wildlife. In addition, The Nature Conservancy of Washington is developing ecoregional plans to guide its conservation programs.

However, there is concern that existing programs are not well coordinated, and that there is no single entity responsible for development and implementation of a state biodiversity strategy.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation must provide a grant for the review of biodiversity programs. The grant must be matched with an equal amount of funding from nonstate sources.

The grantee must convene a biodiversity conservation committee, consisting of representatives from state and federal agencies, local governments, tribes, forestry, agriculture, business, academia, and non-governmental organizations. The committee must develop recommendations for a state biodiversity program.

The purpose of a state biodiversity program is to develop and implement a conservation strategy to maintain Washington's biodiversity in perpetuity. The biodiversity program must include creation of a standing committee to oversee the program and identification of a lead agency. The program must define the state's ecoregions and include development of a statewide landscape management program to replace existing regulatory programs. Finally, the biodiversity program must include stakeholder involvement, public education, and technical assistance to state and local governments.

The biodiversity conservation committee must identify the time frame and cost to implement the biodiversity program. The grantee must provide a final report of the review and recommendations of the biodiversity conservation committee to the Legislature by October 1, 2003.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Recommendations for biodiversity conservation must focus on approaches such as landowner incentives and purchase of conservation easements. The biodiversity conservation committee must recommend a landscape management program to replace existing single-resource programs.

Appropriation: \$49,000.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This will help broaden participation in conservation planning in the state. The state needs better coordination, better data sharing, and a strategic vision for biodiversity conservation; this bill will provide that. Planning for biodiversity conservation can prevent species from being listed as endangered, so the state doesn't need to use regulatory approaches to respond to listings. The intent is not to provide more regulation, but to encourage conservation practices on working landscapes.

Testimony Against: We already have overlapping regulations. We shouldn't encourage more planning that will lead to more regulation. A similar federal program in the Columbia Basin has been extremely controversial and ineffective. The Legislature should not be spending money on this when there are so many higher needs.

Testified: PRO: Josh Weiss, Dave Ware, WDFW; Joe LaTourrrelle, Bruce Taylor, Defenders of Wildlife; Don Stuart, American Farmland Trust; Kit Metlen, WA DNR; Len Barson, The Nature Conservancy; Carole Richmond, IAC; CON: Hertha Lund WSFB; Tip Hudson, WCA.