

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2468

As Passed House:
February 18, 2008

Title: An act relating to improving community and urban forest conditions in Washington state.

Brief Description: Authorizing the department of natural resources to establish an inventory, conduct an assessment, and develop recommendations to improve community and urban forest conditions in Washington state.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives VanDeWege, Warnick, Blake, Dickerson, Linville, Upthegrove, McCoy, Hinkle, Appleton, Lantz, Ormsby, McIntire, Roberts, Kenney, Hudgins, Loomis, Kretz, Kagi and Chase; by request of Department of Natural Resources).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/16/08 [DP];
Appropriations: 1/28/08, 1/30/08 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/18/08, 94-1.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Changes the authority for the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a community and urban forestry program from discretionary to mandatory.
- Requires the Department of Natural Resources to develop and conduct inventories and assessments of community and urban forests.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; VanDeWege, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Lantz, Loomis, McCoy, Nelson and Orcutt.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 32 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Dunshee, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Ericks, Fromhold, Grant, Green, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunt, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDonald, McIntire, Morrell, Pettigrew, Priest, Ross, Schmick, Schual-Berke, Seaquist, Sullivan and Walsh.

Staff: Alicia Dunkin (786-7178).

Background:

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is authorized to establish a community and urban forestry program. Community and urban forests are identified as land within human settlements that does, or could, support trees. The program authorized at the DNR may include assistance to local governments to encourage proper tree maintenance, policy and program coordination assistance, and the provision of surplus equipment to local governments to aid urban forestry programs.

The DNR is also authorized to enter into agreements with non-profit tree-planting organizations and other entities with interests related to urban forestry. Funding can be received by the DNR from the federal government or by gifts and grants. The DNR may also charge fees for workshops and material distribution to raise funds. Once received, the DNR utilizes the funding for the purposes of forwarding urban and community forestry in the state.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The authority for the DNR to conduct a community and urban forestry program is changed from discretionary to mandatory, and definitions are provided for the terms "community and urban forest assessment" and "community and urban forest inventory."

In addition to requiring the current program to continue, the DNR is also directed to conduct a prioritized statewide inventory of community and urban forests, conduct an urban forest assessment, develop an implementation plan for the inventory and assessment of community and urban forests, and aid in the recognition of opportunities for cooperation with vegetation management programs undertaken by utilities and public works departments. The process required to be undertaken by the DNR must be developed in a way that can support local government efforts in planning, entering any developing carbon markets, and developing local urban forestry ordinances.

The criteria and implementation plan for the inventory and assessment must be completed by no later than December 1, 2008. An initial inventory and assessment must be completed prior to June 1, 2010. The initial inventory and assessment must include the willing municipalities within one county located east, and one county located west of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

The uniform criteria and implementation plan for the inventory and assessment must be developed by the DNR with the advice of an advisory committee composed of various professionals with expertise related to urban forestry. Members of the advisory committee must be appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands and are eligible for travel reimbursement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: (Agriculture & Natural Resources)

(In support) The state's growing population leads to larger cities with citizens increasingly disconnected to nature. Urban forests soften the hard edges of cities, reduce summer temperatures, sequester carbon, decrease crime rates, and increase retail spending. The improvement in livability provided by trees makes people more comfortable in urban settings and decreases interest in moving further out into working lands.

Thriving urban forests take planning and maintenance, they do not happen by coincidence or accident. Many towns want vibrant urban forests, but lack the necessary resources. Planning for the right tree in the right place improves safety and utility conflicts and reduces liability concerns over unhealthy or improperly located trees.

The bill provides financial and technical support without mandates. Large and small cities located on both sides of the Cascades benefit from additional assistance and the enhanced ability to obtain federal grants.

The bill facilitates partnerships with cities and the state, and provides a way for cities to partner with other groups interested in tree stewardship. Cities currently operating successful tree programs have all benefitted from DNR-provided assistance.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: (Appropriations)

(In support) This bill is agreed upon language by the environmental community, utilities, and cities. The environmental community is running another bill that would include this language but has mandatory language that municipalities may not agree to. If the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) completes an inventory and analysis of urban forests, it will position the state to get more federal grants to support local governments. The DNR has had an urban forests program since 1991, which is fully federally funded, and supports two staff and provided \$2 million in grants to local governments since its inception. Urban forests help the physical, physiological, and economic environment and replacing city streets with plants and trees is a good idea. All 281 cities would be required to assess their urban forests. We

support this bill in its current form, but there is another bill that would do the same thing as this bill though would need to be scaled differently to not be regulatory of all cities.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (Agriculture & Natural Resources) (In support) Garth Davis, Spokane Conservation District; Vicki Christiansen, Washington Department of Natural Resources; Miguel Perez, Audubon Society; and Dave Williams, Association of Washington Cities.

Persons Testifying: (Appropriations) Representative Van de Wege, prime sponsor; Dave Williams, Association of Washington Cities; Vicki Christiansen, Department of Natural Resources; and D. Yoshe Ravelle.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Agriculture & Natural Resources) None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: (Appropriations) None.