
HOUSE BILL 1273

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2019 Regular Session

By Representatives Kretz, Blake, Orcutt, Chapman, Rude, Maycumber, Fitzgibbon, Hoff, MacEwen, Smith, Van Werven, and Tharinger

Read first time 01/17/19. Referred to Committee on Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources.

1 AN ACT Relating to analyzing state regulatory impact on small
2 forest landowners; and creating a new section.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) Small forest landowners own and manage
5 approximately three million two hundred thousand acres of
6 Washington's forestlands and exert a tremendous influence on public
7 resources, including fish bearing streams, air, wildlife habitat, and
8 carbon sequestration.

9 (2) Adoption of the forest and fish report was made possible, in
10 part, by the agreement of small forest landowners who supported the
11 intent of the law despite significant economic impacts to some
12 members of the small forest landowner community. Twenty years after
13 the adoption of the forests and fish report, it is time to evaluate
14 how the increased regulatory burden has impacted small forest
15 landowners and their land.

16 (3) When the forests and fish report was adopted, the legislature
17 enacted RCW 76.13.100 as follows:

18 "(1) The legislature finds that increasing regulatory
19 requirements continue to diminish the economic viability of small
20 forest landowners. The concerns set forth in RCW 77.85.180 about the
21 importance of sustaining forestry as a viable land use are

1 particularly applicable to small landowners because of the location
2 of their holdings, the expected complexity of the regulatory
3 requirements, and the need for significant technical expertise not
4 readily available to small landowners. The further reduction in
5 harvestable timber owned by small forest landowners as a result of
6 the rules to be adopted under RCW 76.09.055 will further erode small
7 landowners' economic viability and willingness or ability to keep the
8 lands in forestry use and, therefore, reduce the amount of habitat
9 available for salmon recovery and conservation of other aquatic
10 resources, as defined in RCW 76.09.020.

11 (2) The legislature finds that the concerns identified in
12 subsection (1) of this section should be addressed by establishing
13 within the department of natural resources a small forest landowner
14 office that shall be a resource and focal point for small forest
15 landowner concerns and policies. The legislature further finds that a
16 forestry riparian easement program shall be established to acquire
17 easements from small landowners along riparian and other areas of
18 value to the state for protection of aquatic resources. The
19 legislature further finds that small forest landowners should have
20 the option of alternate management plans or alternate harvest
21 restrictions on smaller harvest units that may have a relatively low
22 impact on aquatic resources. The small forest landowner office should
23 be responsible for assisting small landowners in the development and
24 implementation of these plans or restrictions."

25 (4) The twentieth anniversary of the forest and fish law presents
26 an optimal time to review how state regulatory action, intended to
27 benefit both landowners and habitat, has affected small forest
28 landowners. How have programs intended to make up for the
29 disproportionate economic impact been implemented? What can the
30 legislature do to keep small forest landowners on the landscape, so
31 their land will be available for salmon habitat rather than
32 converted?

33 (5) (a) A legislative work group is created to analyze the state
34 regulatory impact on small forest landowners. The work group is
35 comprised of four members, one each from the two largest caucuses in
36 the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of the house
37 of representatives, and one each from the two largest caucuses of the
38 senate, appointed by the president of the senate. The work group may
39 contract with outside entities such as the University of Washington
40 or the Washington state institute for public policy.

1 (b) The work group must address, at a minimum, the following
2 questions:

3 (i) Have the number of small forest landowners increased or
4 decreased?

5 (ii) (A) Has the acreage held by small forest landowners increased
6 or decreased?

7 (B) Did land no longer owned by small forest landowners convert
8 to nonforest use, become industrial forestland, land trust land, or
9 some other use?

10 (iii) In RCW 76.13.100(2) the legislature described three
11 programs to assist small forest landowners and mitigate the
12 disproportionate economic impact. How have those three programs been
13 implemented?

14 (A) Small forest landowner office: Does it have adequate
15 resources and authority to successfully address landowner concerns?

16 (B) Forest riparian easement program: Does the structure of the
17 program adequately address economic impact to landowners? Has funding
18 kept up with need? How has the lack of funding affected the stability
19 of riparian habitat?

20 (C) Have meaningful alternate management plans or alternate
21 harvest restrictions been developed for smaller harvest units?

22 (iv) Would meaningful alternate harvest restrictions reduce the
23 financial burden on the forest riparian easement program?

24 (v) How can the legislature incentivize small forest landowners
25 to maintain their land as forestland?

26 (vi) Could a program be developed to facilitate small forest
27 landowner's participation in carbon markets?

28 (6) The work group must report to the appropriate committees of
29 the legislature by November 1, 2019, with recommendations to improve
30 retention of working forestland held by small forest landowners.

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