

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5898

As Reported By House Committee On:

Agriculture & Ecology

Title: An act relating to open burning of grasses grown for seed.

Brief Description: Providing that research studies for alternatives to grass burning be conducted by Washington State University.

Sponsors: Senators Rasmussen, West, Loveland, Newhouse, Bauer and Morton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 3/22/95, 3/30/95 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Chandler, Chairman; Koster, Vice Chairman; McMorris, Vice Chairman; Mastin, Ranking Minority Member; Chappell, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boldt; Clements; Delvin; R. Fisher; Honeyford; Johnson; Kremen; Poulsen; Regala; Robertson and Schoesler.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Rust.

Staff: Rick Anderson (786-7114).

Background: State law requires grass seed burning to be prohibited once a practical alternative to burning has been identified by the Department of Ecology. The department may limit the number of acres of grass seed burned until an alternative is identified.

In 1973, the Legislature established a 50 cent per acre fee on grass seed burning. Money from the fee must fund research to identify "economical and practical alternate agricultural practices" to grass seed burning. In 1990, the fee was increased to \$1 per acre. Based on the recommendations of an agricultural burning task force, the fee will revert to 50 cents per acre in April 1995. The fee is administered by the Department of Ecology.

The department has used the fee to fund four research projects. From 1977 to 1985, the University of Washington received \$118,000 to design and test a portable grass seed burning machine. From 1989 to 1991, Washington State University received \$41,000 to refine the grass seed burner. From 1991 to 1993, a private company received \$104,000 to develop dethatching equipment. Since 1993, the Washington State University has received \$72,000 to develop management practices that address post harvest operations, including dethatching.

Summary of Amended Bill: The Department of Ecology may use the grass seed burning fee solely to fund research conducted by the Washington State University. The university may not use more than 8 percent of the research funds for administrative overhead. The university is required to submit a brief report every two years to the appropriate standing committees of the Legislature assessing the potential of its research to result in practical and economical alternatives to grass seed burning.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The amended bill adds provisions limiting the university's administrative charges and terminating the reporting requirement once an alternative to burning has been identified.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: Washington State University is the appropriate entity to conduct research on alternatives to grass seed growing.

Testimony Against: The bill will require seed growers to pay a burning fee.

Testified: Senator Rasmussen (prime sponsor); Les Clemons, Washington Seed Council (con); Arlen Davison, Washington State University (pro); Larry Gady, Intermountain Grass Growers Association; and John Cornwall, Intermountain Grass Growers Association.