

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2186

As Reported By House Committee On:

Agriculture & Ecology

Title: An act relating to identifying critical ecological functions within a water resource inventory area.

Brief Description: Requiring a methodology to identify critical ecological functions within a WRIA.

Sponsors: Representatives Linville, Regala, Chandler and Blalock.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 3/5/97 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Chandler, Chairman; Parlette, Vice Chairman; Schoesler, Vice Chairman; Linville, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cooper; Delvin; Koster; Mastin; Regala and Sump.

Staff: Rick Anderson (786-7114).

Background: As part of its management plan, the Puget Sound Action Team has provided funds to develop a voluntary, non-regulatory program for restoring wetlands. The program uses geographic information system (GIS) technology to identify how wetlands can provide or improve certain benefits such as flood control, fish and wildlife habitat, aquifer recharge, water quality, and water quantity. The program also identifies where wetlands are likely to work (provide functions) and where they are unlikely to work. The program was developed in the Stillaguamish water resource inventory area and will also be developed for the Nooksack and Snohomish water resource inventory areas. A water resource inventory area is a watershed. The Department of Ecology has divided the state into 62 water resource inventory areas or watersheds.

Summary of Bill: Legislative findings are made that the current water quality regulatory system may become more effective and efficient if regulations are based on critical watershed functions.

The Puget Sound Action Team is directed to develop a methodology to identify critical watershed functions within a water resource inventory area. The methodology must use GIS technology to identify critical watershed functions, areas where functions are impaired, the causes of function impairment, and existing land uses.

Critical watershed functions— is defined to include any geological, biological, or hydrological function that protects or enhances water quality, water quantity, fish and wildlife, or flood control.

The action team is also required to select a water resource inventory area and to conduct a case study in that watershed. The purpose of the case study is to determine if the information generated from the methodology can be used to expedite agency permit decisions for wetland mitigation proposals and to expedite the planning process for growth management plans, flood control plans, and local shoreline plans. The action team must develop specific policy recommendations, based on the case study, and submit them to the Legislature by December 1, 1999.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 5, 1997.

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

Testimony For: The Department of Transportation (DOT) has done a great deal of work to advance the concept of watershed management and is supportive of this bill. The DOT has done much of its work in Snohomish County and the action team should consider choosing this area to conduct its case study. The Action Team is supportive of this bill and has included funding for this bill in its workplan and budget.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Rico Baroga, Washington State Department of Transportation; and Tom Cowan, Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team (in favor).