

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5620

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 28, 2005

Title: An act relating to priority consideration of voluntary buffers in open space plans, public benefit rating systems, and assessed valuation schedules.

Brief Description: Providing for priority consideration of voluntary buffers in open space plans and public benefit rating systems.

Sponsors: Senators Kline, Mulliken, Pridemore, Kastama, Poulsen, Rockefeller, Fairley and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/24/05, 2/28/05 [DPS, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5620 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Kastama, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Fairley, Haugen, Kline, McCaslin, Mulliken and Pridemore.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Benton.

Staff: Genevieve Pisarski (786-7488)

Background: The state's Open Space Taxation Act allows property owners to have their open space, farm and agricultural, and timber lands valued according to current use rather than highest and best use, in order to help assure the continued existence of sufficient lands for production of food, fiber, and forest crops and for the use and enjoyment of natural resources and scenic beauty. Counties are authorized to set open space priorities, adopt an open space plan, and create a "public benefit rating system" for tax assessment purposes. There must also be an "assessed valuation schedule" for determining the taxable value of qualifying land, and only the current use, and not the potential uses, of the land may be considered.

Summary of Substitute Bill: In adopting open space plans, public benefit rating systems, and assessed valuation schedules, counties must give priority consideration to lands used for buffers that have primarily native vegetation. Priority consideration includes establishing classification eligibility and maintenance criteria. Counties that do not already give priority consideration to buffers must do so by July 1, 2006.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Required, as well as voluntary, buffers must be given priority consideration. The title is amended accordingly. Priority consideration must be given by July 1, 2006.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: The sponsorship of this bill shows that this is a nonpartisan proposal. It provides an incentive for landowners to establish buffers, which are a very important tool for improving water quality. Landowners who are required to establish buffers should also be provided an incentive to maintain the required buffers.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Kline, prime sponsor; Genesee Adkins, Futurewise.