

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1789

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### As Reported by House Committee On:

Agriculture and Natural Resources

**Title:** An act relating to expanding revenue generation and economic opportunities from natural climate solutions and ecosystem services.

**Brief Description:** Expanding revenue generation and economic opportunities from natural climate solutions and ecosystem services.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Reeves, Fitzgibbon, Chapman, Kloba, Ramel, Pollet and Fosse; by request of Department of Natural Resources.

### Brief History:

#### Committee Activity:

Agriculture and Natural Resources: 2/14/23, 2/17/23 [DPS].

#### Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to enter into contracts for ecosystem services projects to generate revenue by providing ecosystem services that directly or indirectly benefit humans or enhance social welfare.
- Provides that ecosystem service projects must result in no net decrease in agricultural production for agricultural lands, nor in the decadal sustainable harvest volume and operable forestland acres on state lands and state forestlands within the sustainable harvest unit.
- Provides that ecosystem service projects must result in a net increase in future sustainable harvest volume on forested state trust lands within the sustainable harvest unit.
- Provides that any payment for an ecosystem service project, contract, or agreement may not limit or impair the exercise of tribal treaty and reserved rights, existing tribal access to lands managed by the DNR, or preexisting agreements between tribes and the DNR.

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- Requires the Board of Natural Resources to approve contract terms and minimum payment for ecosystem services before entering into a contract.
- Requires the DNR to report to the Legislature and the Office of Financial Management by December 1, 2024, on ecosystem services projects.

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## HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Chapman, Chair; Morgan, Vice Chair; Reeves, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Lekanoff and Springer.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Chandler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kloba, Orcutt and Schmick.

**Staff:** Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

### **Background:**

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages 5.6 million acres of state-owned land, which includes forestlands; aquatic lands; and state trust land that provides revenue to help pay for construction of public schools, universities, and other state institutions, and funds services in many counties. The Commissioner of Public Lands (Commissioner) is a separately elected statewide official and the administrator for the DNR. The Commissioner chairs the state's Board of Natural Resources, which sets policy for the management of state lands and also the Forest Practices Board, which regulates forest operations.

Generally, valuable materials that are derived on state forestlands and state-owned aquatic lands may be sold, and the funds from those sales must be used in certain ways:

- Monies derived from the sale of valuable materials from state forestlands, except for sales derived from forest health treatments, must be deposited into the Forest Development Account. Through the 2023 fiscal biennium, up to 27 percent must be returned to the Forest Development Account for administration, reforestation, and protection costs. Any balance remaining must be paid to the county in which the land is located or, in the case of a land pool, to each county participating in the pool.
- Monies derived from the sale of valuable materials derived from state-owned aquatic lands must be deposited into the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA). Funds in the ALEA must be used solely for: (1) aquatic lands enhancement projects; (2) purchase, improvement, or protection of aquatic lands for public purposes; (3) providing and improving access to aquatic lands; and (4) volunteer cooperative fish and game projects.

## **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may enter into contracts for payment for ecosystem services projects on all public lands managed by the DNR, according to terms and conditions acceptable to the DNR, in order to generate revenue by providing ecosystem services that directly or indirectly benefit humans or enhance social welfare. Contracts may last for up to 125 years. Ecosystem service projects are projects that provide benefits that the public enjoys as a result of natural processes and biodiversity. Ecosystem services include carbon sequestration and storage, air and water filtration, climate stabilization, and disturbance mitigation.

Proceeds from contracts must be deposited into the appropriate account in the State Treasury and distributed in the same manner as money derived from the sale of valuable materials under current law. Proceeds from contracts on state forestlands must be deposited into the Forest Development Account. Proceeds from the sale of ecosystem services derived from state-owned aquatic lands must be deposited into the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account.

The DNR may:

- directly offer ecosystem services credits for sale with established compliance or voluntary ecosystem services marketplaces;
- enter into contracts with ecosystem services project developers or brokers through public auction or by direct negotiation to bring ecosystem services credits to the market, subject to rules adopted by the Board of Natural Resources (Board); and
- enter into contracts or agreements with third-party ecosystem services project developers or brokers for purposes that include determining the feasibility of entering into an ecosystem services project contract, establishing a payment for an ecosystem services project with an ecosystem services marketplace, and marketing and selling credits on an established ecosystem services marketplace.

Ecosystem service projects must result in no net decrease in agricultural production for agricultural lands and no net decrease in the decadal sustainable harvest volume and operable forestland acres on state lands and state forestlands within the sustainable harvest unit. Additionally, ecosystem service projects must result in a net increase in future sustainable harvest volume on forested state trust lands within the sustainable harvest unit. Payment for an ecosystem services project, contract, or agreement may not limit or impair the exercise of tribal treaty and reserved rights, existing tribal access to lands managed by the DNR, or preexisting agreements between tribes and the DNR.

The DNR must publish notice of intent to enter contract negotiations on its website within 90 days preceding the commencement of negotiations. The DNR may conduct additional advertising that it determines is in the best interest of the state.

Upon execution of a contract, the DNR must report the term of the contract and projected

revenues to the Board. Before entering into a sale of ecosystem services credits, the Board must set a minimum payment and approve contract terms valid for at least 180 days. The Board may reestablish the minimum payment at any time. The DNR may set the final payment, which must be based on current market prices.

The DNR must submit a report to the Legislature and the Office of Financial Management by December 1, 2024, that includes: (1) information on payment for ecosystem service projects entered into or committed to by the DNR, including type of projects, the number of acres involved, and projected revenues; and (2) any challenges or barriers encountered by the DNR in the process of attempting to implement carbon offset or payment for ecosystem service projects and recommendations to address those challenges and barriers.

Definitions are provided for the following additional terms:

- An ecosystem services credit is a predetermined and standardized unit that represents measurable ecosystem services provided in the context of a payment for an ecosystem services project.
- A carbon offset credit is 1 metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent removed from the atmosphere or prevented from being emitted into the atmosphere as a result of a carbon offset project and within a carbon market transaction.
- A carbon offset project is a project that reduces or removes certain greenhouse gasses.
- Net increase in future sustainable harvest volume means there must be an increase in future calculations of the sustainable harvest level within the sustainable harvest unit where the projects are located that is demonstrably due to the payment for ecosystem service projects over the contract term of the projects considered.
- No net decrease in agricultural production means no net decrease in the productivity of agricultural land entered into an ecosystem service project that is demonstrably due to the payment for ecosystem service projects.
- No net decrease in decadal sustainable harvest volume and operable acres on state lands and state forestlands means no net decrease in the sustainable harvest volume and operable acres within the sustainable harvest unit where the projects are located that is demonstrably due to payment for ecosystem service projects in the sustainable harvest level on state lands and state forestlands for the decade in which the DNR is currently operating under at the time of project initiation.

### **Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

As compared to the original bill, the substitute bill:

- provides that ecosystem service projects must result in no net decrease in agricultural production for agricultural lands and no net decrease in the decadal sustainable harvest volume and operable forestland acres on state lands and state forestlands within the sustainable harvest unit;
- provides that ecosystem service projects must result in a net increase in future sustainable harvest volume on forested state trust lands within the sustainable harvest unit;

- provides that any payment for an ecosystem services project, contract, or agreement may not limit or impair the exercise of tribal treaty and reserved rights, existing tribal access to lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), or preexisting agreements between tribes and the DNR;
- removes the ability of the Board of Natural Resources to transfer the authority to approve of contracts to the Commissioner of Public Lands;
- requires the DNR to submit a report to the Legislature and the Office of Financial Management by December 1, 2024, that includes: (1) information on payments for ecosystem service projects entered into or committed to by the DNR, including type of projects, the number of acres involved, and projected revenues; and (2) any challenges or barriers encountered by the DNR in the process of attempting to implement carbon offset or payment for ecosystem service projects and recommendations to address those challenges and barriers;
- defines "no net decrease in agricultural production," "no net decrease in decadal sustainable harvest volume," and "net increase in future sustainable harvest volume;"
- updates the intent section incorporating reference to trust beneficiaries, agriculture and forest production, carbon stored in built environment in wood products, and consultation with impacted stakeholders; and
- makes clarifying and technical changes.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Lands that are managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provide critical ecosystem services like habitat and carbon sequestration, but also provide important building materials and agricultural products that humans need. This bill will allow the DNR to tap into new revenue streams to provide money to schools and the trust beneficiaries, to support salmon recovery, and to help mitigate impacts from a rapidly changing climate. The DNR will continue to support working forests. Currently, the DNR is limited in its ability to sell carbon credits under the Climate Commitment Act. Carbon projects can help prevent the conversion of forestlands to other non-forest uses. This is a thoughtful, proactive approach to help rural communities generate revenue. State lands provide ongoing benefits to wildlife by keeping ecosystems intact ensuring healthy elk and deer populations that are so important to the ways of life of the state's tribal nations. There should be an amendment that ensures that the DNR's projects will not impede tribal treaty rights. Offsets are less expensive than allowances and are a source of innovation. There is an increasing demand for offsets and as a result they have a higher value coming to market.

Land use and forest practices should be responsive to science. Forest carbon projects come in various shapes and sizes, and can be done in a way that benefits the trust beneficiaries. Landowners can lengthen rotations with more thinning. Some areas could benefit from ecosystem projects along diverse landscapes. Language should be added from Senate Bill 5688 to allow the Department of Ecology to support the DNR. The devil is in the details. Nature-based and forest-based credits are emerging and fast-growing markets. New jobs will be created. The bill provides a clear role for the Board of Natural Resources (Board) to establish minimum payments. It is difficult to achieve climate targets without a system in place. Ecosystem service projects and sustainable timber economy are not mutually exclusive. This is a way to compensate rural communities for the ecosystem services that they provide. Maintaining healthy ecosystems also contributes to human health benefits. With this bill, the DNR will have the same ability as the private sector to sell credits in voluntary markets. There are no downsides to this bill.

(Opposed) The bill requires the Board to abdicate its responsibilities by transferring authority to the Commissioner of Public Lands (Commissioner), and gives the DNR sweeping new authority. Rural communities rely on revenue generated from state-owned forestlands. Wood is the only reliably sustainable building material. There is concern that this bill will result in job loss in the timber and milling industries, reduce revenue to junior taxing districts, and negatively impact investments in local companies. Trustees and the public have not had a chance to review this policy. Not enough work has been done to ensure that this policy will not result in reduced timber harvest. If less timber is harvested there will be a need to import wood to meet our construction needs, resulting in even more carbon emissions, possibly from countries that do not share our values. Please get this complicated policy right. This bill is fraught with pitfalls. The DNR's modeling and knowledge is insufficient to fully assess all of the impacts of this legislation. It is important to think globally but act locally. The most effective climate solutions include local action. Washington is ahead of the game, but this bill does not lead toward the cohesive strategy that is needed. Allowing such long lease terms potentially allows prime timberland to be taken out of production for a century. Lease terms of 125 years could also be used by a future Commissioner or staff to prevent harvesting and management strategies.

(Other) Counties are the beneficiaries of revenues generated on state lands. The money goes to support schools, emergency services, and other important services. Counties support the intent of the legislation. Any legislation on this topic must guarantee added value, increased revenue, no net decrease in timber harvesting, and that revenue from ecosystem services projects does not substitute for timber revenue.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Kristine Reeves, prime sponsor; Jeremy Wilbur, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community; Sherri Dysart, League of Women Voters of Washington; Isaac Kastama, Clean and Prosperous Washington; Jerry Ericsson, Columbia Carbon; Mariska Kecskes, Sierra Club; Paula Swedeen; Raymond Paoella; Justin Allegro, The Nature Conservancy; Darcy Nonemacher, Washington Conservation Action; Hilary Franz, Department of Natural Resources; Thor Kallestad, Myno Carbon Corp; and Chris

Covert-Bowlds.

(Opposed) Tom Lannen, Skamania County Commissioners; Randy Johnson, Clallam County Board of Commissioners; Connie Beauvais, Port of Port Angeles; Heath Heikkila, American Forest Resource Council; Bill Turner, Sierra Pacific Industries; Doug Cooper, Hampton Lumber Company; Lawrence Marshall, Murphy Company; Ron Hurn, Interfor Corporation; Brian Karnes, Cascade Hardwood; Elaine Oneil; John Henrikson, Wild Thyme Tree Farm; Rod Fleck, City of Forks; and Eric ffitch, Washington Public Ports Association.

(Other) Paul Jewell, Washington State Association of Counties.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.