

RCW 90.74.005 Findings—Intent. (1) The legislature finds that:

(a) The state lacks a clear policy relating to the mitigation of wetlands and aquatic habitat for infrastructure development;

(b) Regulatory agencies have generally required project proponents to use compensatory mitigation only at the site of the project's impacts and to mitigate narrowly for the habitat or biological functions impacted by a project;

(c) This practice of considering traditional on-site, in-kind mitigation may provide fewer environmental benefits when compared to innovative mitigation proposals that provide benefits in advance of a project's planned impacts and that restore functions or habitat other than those impacted at a project site;

(d) Regulatory decisions on development proposals that attempt to incorporate innovative mitigation measures take an unreasonably long period of time and are subject to a great deal of uncertainty and additional expenses; and

(e) Greater environmental benefits may be achievable through compensatory environmental mitigation when the collective mitigation investments of project proponents is paired with the structure of successful state programs that are referenced in statute and are designed to enhance and preserve aquatic and riparian functions when there is a clear linkage between the environmental impacts and the goals of the state program. Programs such as the forestry riparian easement program, the family forest fish passage program, and the riparian open space program created pursuant to RCW 76.09.040 may have a logical and physical nexus with many underlying projects, especially road projects, and are proven to create a sustained benefit in the aquatic environment.

(2) The legislature therefore declares that it is the policy of the state to authorize innovative mitigation measures by requiring state regulatory agencies to consider mitigation proposals for projects that are timed, designed, and located in a manner to provide equal or better biological functions and values compared to traditional on-site, in-kind mitigation proposals.

(3) It is the intent of the legislature to authorize local governments to accommodate the goals of this chapter. It is not the intent of the legislature to: (a) Restrict the ability of a project proponent to pursue project specific mitigation; or (b) create any new authority for regulating wetlands or aquatic habitat beyond what is specifically provided for in this chapter. [2012 c 62 § 2; 1997 c 424 § 1.]