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**State Government Committee**

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**2SSB 5694**

**Brief Description:** Creating a pilot project to develop an integrated environmental permit system.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Swecker, Jacobsen, Horn, Doumit, Haugen and Rasmussen).

**Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill**

- Requires the Office of Permit Assistance to develop a guide for creating a unified project decision support document and to develop recommendations for an integrated permit system through the use of a pilot project.

**Hearing Date:** 3/27/03

**Staff:** Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

**Background:**

State, federal, and local environmental regulations are administered by several different agencies, most of which have their own permitting requirements. In addition, many of the permit process requirements conflict, overlap or are duplicative. As a result, environmental permits can be delayed when review processes are done in sequence rather than concurrently.

The Permit Assistance Center (PAC) was created in 1995 in the Department of Ecology (DOE) to provide the public with information regarding environmental permitting laws and to provide assistance to businesses and public agencies in complying with these laws. In addition to other requirements, the PAC was directed to develop and provide a coordinated state permitting procedure that project applicants could use at their option and expense and was authorized by statute to recover costs for this coordinated permit process.

In 2001 the Environmental Permit Streamlining Act was enacted to streamline the environmental permit process for transportation projects. Under this act, the Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee (TPEAC) was established and charged to identify and integrate processes to streamline the permitting process for pilot transportation projects, transportation projects of statewide significance and programmatic projects. The Department of Transportation was granted authority to prepare certain permits, with

permitting agencies retaining approval authority. This act expires March 31, 2003.

In 2002 the PAC was renamed the Office of Permit Assistance (OPA) and was transferred to the Office of Financial Management (OFM). Under this legislation, the OPA's responsibilities were expanded to:

- develop informal processes for dispute resolution between agencies and project applicants;
- conduct customer surveys to evaluate its effectiveness;
- review initiatives developed by the TPEAC to determine if any would be beneficial if implemented for other projects;
- prioritize expenditures of general fund money to provide services to small project applicants; and
- provide biennial reports to the Legislature on OPA performance, on any identified statutory or regulatory conflicts related to authorities and roles of permit agencies, and on use of outside independent consultants in the coordinated permit process.

**Summary of Bill:**

By December 1, 2005, the OPA is required to develop a guide for creating a unified project decision support document to be used by state and federal agencies and local governments in support of regulatory decision making. In consultation with the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the TPEAC, the OPA will test, revise, and add to the unified permit binder currently being developed by the WSDOT.

The OPA also is required to develop recommendations for an integrated permit system that incorporates project design, environmental review, permitting, and mitigation; develop recommendations for legislative changes to statutory authorizations and administrative procedures needed to establish the system; and develop detailed recommendations for full-scale testing of the system through one or more pilot projects.

For purposes of developing the guide and the integrated permit system, the OPA is directed to conduct a pilot project using a project deemed to have significance in terms of economic development.

The OPA must submit progress reports to the appropriate legislative committees by December 1, 2003 and December 1, 2004, and a final report by December 1, 2005.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available on the original bill.

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