

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SSB 6144

C 218 L 04

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Developing a statewide plan to address forest health.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Morton and Deccio).

Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Energy & Water

Senate Committee on Ways & Means

House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources

House Committee on Appropriations

Background: Numerous studies have found that many American forests are under stress from poor forest conditions. The problem basically includes forest weeds, tree disease, overly dense forest areas and species growing in areas where they have not traditionally grown. The resulting problems from forest diseases include the risk of wildfire and loss of habitat for wildlife. Continuing threats from the introduction and spread of non-native pests and plants, extreme weather events, climatic flux and changes in forest conditions due to both man and nature are placing numerous forests at risk. This includes both those forests that are managed for timber production and those that are managed for multiple uses and for wilderness preservation.

The United States Congress has passed legislation requiring that the United States Forest Service work to improve forest health conditions. The Washington State authority for forest health has not been updated since the early 1950s. Since the statute is out of date, and since the problem has become much more serious in the last three decades, new statutory requirements need to be put in place.

Summary: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is given temporary authority to use its contract harvesting program to conduct silvicultural treatments in specific areas of state forest land where health deficiencies have been identified. All treatments must be tailored to improve the health of the forest stand, and must be in accordance with all applicable forest health plans, laws, and other agreements. When planning for silvicultural treatments, DNR is instructed to give priority to fulfilling existing forest plans.

All contract harvesting operations that are conducted primarily for forest health are exempt from the annual 10 percent cap on contract harvesting sales.

Authority to use the contract harvesting program for silviculture expires in 2007. In 2006, DNR must report to the Legislature a summary of silvicultural operations carried out using contract harvesting.

The Commissioner of Public Lands is designated as the state's lead for forest health issues. As such, the commissioner is expected to promote communications between the state, the federal government, state agencies, and local governments. The commissioner must use

available avenues to influence federal decisions that could impact forest health in Washington. These avenues can include, when deemed by the commissioner to be in the best interest of the state, appearing before federal agencies, developing formal comments on federal forest management plans, and pursuing cooperative agreements with the United States Forest Service.

A work group is created to study opportunities to improve forest health and to aid the commissioner with the development of a statewide plan for forest health. The work group's participants will generally be appointed by the commissioner, and include up to 14 individuals with knowledge in forests, forest ecology, or forest health.

Recommendations and findings are due to the Legislature and the Board of Natural Resources by December 30, 2004. Directions to the work group include:

- Evaluating the current forest health laws and other state laws that may be used as models for future forest health legislation;
- Studying incentives for landowners to maintain forest health;
- Developing recommendations for the proper treatment of damaged timber; and
- Recommending if the work group should be extended.

The work group expires on June 30, 2005 and the contract harvest provisions related to forest health expire December 31, 2007.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate 48 0
House 96 0 (House amended)
Senate 48 0 (Senate concurred)

Effective: March 29, 2004