

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SSB 6144

As Passed Senate, February 13, 2004

Title: An act relating to opportunities and strategies for improving forest health in Washington.

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

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

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Energy & Water: 1/14/04, 2/4/04 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/9/04 [DP2S].
Passed Senate: 2/13/04, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, ENERGY & WATER

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6144 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Morton, Chair; Hewitt, Vice Chair; Doumit, Hale, Hargrove, Honeyford, Oke and Regala.

Staff: Vic Moon (786-7469)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 6144 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Zarelli, Chair; Hewitt, Vice Chair; Parlette, Vice Chair; Carlson, Doumit, Fairley, Fraser, Hale, Honeyford, Johnson, Pflug, Prentice, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Sheahan, B. Sheldon and Winsley.

Staff: Brian Sims (786-7431)

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 Since the statute is out of date, and since the problem has become much more serious in the last three decades, new statutory requirements need to be put in place.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 of Bill: The Commissioner of Public Lands and the Department of Natural Resources must develop cooperative agreements with the United States Forest Service and the United States Bureau of Land Management under the Endangered Species Act or other statutes to address forest health issues on a government-to-government basis. The commissioner reports to chairs of the House of Representatives and Senate natural resources committees every year on the progress to develop the cooperative agreements.

The Commissioner of Public Lands is designated as Washington's lead for all forest health issues. The commissioner represents the state's interests before local, state and federal agencies and reports to the Legislature on needs for statutory changes and policy issues. The commissioner, as the legislative designated lead, will develop a statewide plan on forest health for both public and private lands.

The Department of Natural Resources and the Forest Practices Board must develop statutory and policy recommendations for the Legislature by December 30, 2004. The purpose of the recommendations is to expedite the salvage of timber from disease-infested, fire, ice, and wind damaged forests on both public and private lands.

A work group to study forest health issues is established. The Commissioner of Public Lands or his designee serves as the work group chair. The work group is comprised of small landowner representatives, a large statewide landowner, a representative from the University of Washington and from Washington State University, a representative of environmental organizations, a representative from counties in eastern Washington and a representative from counties in western Washington, representatives from the forest service from both eastern and western Washington, and representatives from tribal governments, representatives of small forest landowners, a representative from Washington State University's energy office, and a representative appointed by the Governor. The purpose of the work group is to determine whether the goals and requirements of current laws are being met regarding the identification, designation and reduction of significant forest insect and disease threats. The work group will consider how state and private landowners are regulated with respect to forest health standards and identifies opportunities and barriers for improved prevention and losses of public and private resources. The work group helps the commissioner develop a strategic plan for increasing forest conditions with respect to insects, disease, wind damage and fire damage. The work group will develop funding alternatives for consideration by the Legislature. The technical work of the group is performed by the Department of Natural Resources.

The Department of Natural Resources must initiate a pilot project in the Loomis State Forest in 2004 using contract harvesting to restore a healthy forest. Any costs or funds from the pilot project are assigned to the trust ownerships involved.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: Improvements in forest health benefit all lands, and wildlife will be helped by better forest management and fewer forest fires. The state and federal programs need to be fully coordinated and Washington law needs to be updated. The Commissioner of Public Lands is the appropriate person to direct the state's effort.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Pat McElroy, Howard Thronson, Department of Natural Resources; Martin Flynn, Farm Forestry Association; Maurice Williamson, Society of Apiarian Foresters; Peter Heide, Washington Forest Protection Association; Mickey Woolley, Small Forest Landowners; Tim Boyd, Vaagen Brothers Lumber; Bill Garvin, WFPA.

House Amendment(s): The Commissioner of Public Lands is the lead for all forest health issues and will be assisted by a temporary work group in developing a state forest health plan. The Department of Natural Resources will use existing contract harvesting authority to improve forest health.