

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 5179

As Reported by House Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks
Appropriations

Title: An act relating to forest health.

Brief Description: Studying forest health issues.

Sponsors: Senators Morton, Jacobsen, Sheldon and Stevens.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks: 2/16/06 [DP];
Appropriations: 2/20/06, 2/23/06 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- The Forest Health Strategy Work Group is reconstituted and directed to hold five statewide meetings.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Upthegrove, Vice Chair; Buck, Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Blake, Chandler, Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Hunt, Kagi and Orcutt.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Forest Health Strategy Work Group (Work Group) was created by the Legislature in 2004 and directed to submit their findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 30, 2004.

The legislation that created the Work Group asked its members to study opportunities to improve various forest health issues facing the state. This charge included formulating recommendations for certain issues, such as the proper incentives for helping landowners maintain healthy forests, alternatives for funding, amendments to the current forest health laws, and reviewing the current legal structure for noxious weeds to decide if it is an appropriate model to use in the forest environment. Finally, the Work Group was asked to recommend whether their existence should continue into the future.

The Work Group was comprised of 14 members of diverse backgrounds. Among others, the Work Group was served by representatives of the Department of Natural Resources, the United States Forest Service, academic experts, private foresters, tribal interests, and small forest landowners. Most of the members were appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands, and the Department of Natural Resources provided staff support.

The Work Group completed its task on time and delivered a written report to the members of the former House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The legislation creating the Work Group established a sunset date of June 30, 2005. The 2005 Legislature did not take action to extend the sunset date, so the authority for the Work Group expired.

Summary of Bill:

The expired Work Group is reconstituted with its original membership roster and goals. The Work Group is directed to hold a minimum of five meetings throughout the state so that public input can be gathered. The final recommendations of the Work Group are due to the Legislature by no later than December 30, 2006.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The original process that the Work Group concluded was very helpful, but it needs to be continued. The process brings together all types of forest landowners to address the serious forest health issues facing the state. The Work Group membership has an impressive collective resume, and they should be allowed to finish their original work.

The Work Group's report has been submitted, but the proposed legislation has not been vetted because time ran out. Statewide hearings will be illuminating for the Work Group members and result in a better product. The proposed legislation is important because the current forest health statutes date from the 1950s and are practically unenforceable today. The recommendations of the Work Group will have an impact on private landowners, and all affected citizens should have the opportunity to comment.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Morton, prime sponsor; Pat McElroy, Department of Natural Resources; Miguel Perez-Gibson, Audubon Society; Bill Robinson, The Nature Conservancy; Debra Munguia, Washington Forest Protection Association; and Tim Boyd, Vaagen Brothers Lumber.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Sommers, Chair; Fromhold, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McDonald, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Bailey, Buri, Chandler, Clements, Cody, Conway, Darneille, Dunshee, Grant, Haigh, Hinkle, Hunter, Kagi, Kenney, Kessler, Linville, McDermott, McIntire, Miloscia, Pearson, Priest, Schual-Berke, P. Sullivan, Talcott and Walsh.

Staff: Alicia Paatsch (786-7178).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks:

The amended bill removes the emergency clause and adds a null and void clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: Two years ago this work group was established and the recommendations were very powerful to increase the response of the Department of Natural Resources (Department) to forest health issues. Forest health includes a variety of impacts, such as pathogens, insects, and invasive species, for which the recommendations give added responsibility to the Department. The work group recommended holding public meetings across the state about what the Department will be doing that may impact large forest landowners and others before legislation is proposed.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Bill Robinson, Nature Conservancy.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.