

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5461

As Passed Senate, March 7, 2007

Title: An act relating to continuing the use of contract harvesting for improving forest health on Washington state trust lands.

Brief Description: Improving forest health on state trust lands by continuing the use of contract harvesting for silvicultural treatments.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Jacobsen, Fraser, Hatfield, Hargrove, Benton, Sheldon and Rasmussen; by request of Department of Natural Resources).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 1/29/07, 2/15/07 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 3/07/07, 45-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5461 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Poulsen, Spanel and Stevens.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Historically, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has sold timber by identifying the timber stand to be sold, appraising the timber, and detailing the terms and conditions of the sale. The successful bidder at auction then has the right to harvest and remove the timber within a specified period.

In 2003, the Legislature directed DNR to create a contract harvest program, where DNR contracts with an individual to harvest timber and process that timber into logs sorted to DNR's specifications. DNR cannot use contract harvesting for more than 10 percent of the annual timber volume offered for sale. The Legislature created a revolving account to accept proceeds from contract harvest log sales and to pay the costs of such sales.

In 2004, the Legislature authorized DNR to conduct contract harvest timber sales, or other silvicultural treatments, in areas of trust forestland where DNR has identified forest health deficiencies. DNR must tailor harvesting and silvicultural treatments to improve the health of forestland and must follow applicable management plans, agreements, and laws pertaining to

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timber harvests. The Legislature exempted timber removed primarily to address forest health issues from the volume restriction on contract harvesting.

DNR's specific authority to conduct contract harvest timber sales for forest health purposes expires December 31, 2007.

According to information from the Forest Health Work Group, Washington State contains approximately 21 million acres of forestland. By 2005, over 2.5 million of those forested acres contained elevated levels of tree mortality, defoliation, or foliage disease. The western spruce budworm and bark beetle have caused significant tree damage in the state. The work group cites overcrowded forests as contributing to these elevated forest health and fire risks.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The bill makes permanent DNR's authority to conduct contract harvest timber sales, or other silvicultural treatments, in areas of trust forestland where DNR has identified forest health deficiencies. DNR must prioritize forest health treatments, if no management or landscape plan exists, in order to protect public health and safety, public resources, and the long-term asset value of the trust.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Eastern Washington faces major threats from forest health conditions. DNR has identified 200,000 acres of trust lands in need of thinning treatments. Contract harvest forest health sales provide income to the trusts and the local communities of those contractors hired. Additionally, fire dangers decrease through these treatments, and the mills who acquire additional lumber benefit.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Jim Armstrong, Spokane County Conservation District; Bruce Mackey, DNR; Doug Sutherland, Commissioner of Public Lands; Brenda Hood, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Tim Boyd, Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Boise Building Solutions.