

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1924

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to watershed planning grants.

Brief Description: Concerning watershed planning grants.

Sponsors: Representatives Tharinger, Van De Wege, Takko, Lytton, Fitzgibbon, Upthegrove and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/19/13, 2/21/13 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows additional, match-free, local watershed planning grants of up to \$50,000 for lead entities or plan implementation groups that commit to conducting a review every five years to ensure that the highest priority issues are being addressed.
- Gives priority to funding watershed planning grant applications that would result in the dissolution of a planning unit if not for receiving the grant.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Lytton, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dunshee, Haigh, Hurst, Kretz, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Schmick, Stanford, Van De Wege and Warnick.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Buys.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Watershed Planning Act establishes a process through which local groups can develop and implement plans for managing and protecting local water resources. The local groups authorized to develop watershed plans are organized by water resource inventory areas (WRIAs). A WRIA is, generally speaking, an area determined to be a distinct watershed.

There are 62 WRIAs identified by the Department of Ecology (Department). Each of the WRIAs is identified by a number and may contain a local watershed planning group with an identified lead entity. Once constituted, a WRIA is eligible for grant funding from the Department. There are funding opportunities available for both planning and implementation.

A grant of up to \$50,000 is available for the initial organization of a WRIA planning unit. Additional grants are available for watershed assessments, for developing a watershed plan, and for other steps in the four-phase process of watershed planning. In the fourth phase of watershed planning, the local planning unit is required to provide a 10 percent funding match. After year five, a planning group may apply for two additional years of grant funding. These two additional years may be funded at up to \$50,000 a year.

Summary of Bill:

The phase four watershed planning grants requirement that a local planning unit must provide a 10 percent funding match is waived after the first five years. After the first five years, additional match-free grants of up to \$50,000 are available to local watershed planning groups. To be eligible for the additional grants, a lead entity or plan implementation group must commit to conducting a review of the plan every five years to ensure that the highest priority issues are being addressed.

Priority grant application funding is given to those which, if not receiving the grant, would result in the dissolution of a planning unit.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Water management is a complicated issue that can be very divisive within communities. The groups that participate in watershed management are diverse and represent the collected citizenship of a local community. This creates a process for diverse groups to sit around a table and discuss local issues that are important for local watersheds.

Watershed groups have institutional knowledge and, since they are composed of local citizens, earn trust in the community at a level that state agencies never enjoy.

Continued funding for local watershed groups will allow these important functions to continue after the plan has been developed. There are 18 local watershed groups that would currently be eligible for continued funding with no fiscal impact on the state since the Department would merely be reallocating money that it already has available. Without additional funding, the work done by local watershed groups will no longer be available for water resource management. Sustainable, predictable funding allows the local groups to focus on long-term plan implementation, and not chasing after money that is usually only offered for emerging issues.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Tharinger, prime sponsor; Tom Clingman, Department of Ecology; Josh Weiss, Washington State Association of Counties; Constance Ibsen, Watershed Resource Inventory Area 16/14B; and Dave McClure, Klickitat County.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.