AN ACT Relating to fish passage project permit streamlining; and amending RCW 77.55.181, 90.58.147, and 47.85.020.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

Sec. 1. RCW 77.55.181 and 2020 c 166 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) In order to receive the permit review and approval process created in this section, a fish habitat enhancement project must meet the criteria under this section and must be a project to accomplish one or more of the following tasks:

(i) Elimination of human-made or caused fish passage barriers, including:

(A) Culvert repair and replacement; and

(B) Fish passage barrier removal projects that comply with the forest practices rules, as the term "forest practices rules" is defined in RCW 76.09.020;

(ii) Restoration of an eroded or unstable stream bank employing the principle of bioengineering, including limited use of rock as a stabilization only at the toe of the bank, and with primary emphasis on using native vegetation to control the erosive forces of flowing water;
(iii) Placement of woody debris or other instream structures that benefit naturally reproducing fish stocks; or

(iv) Restoration of native kelp and eelgrass beds and restoring native oysters.

(b) The department shall develop size or scale threshold tests to determine if projects accomplishing any of these tasks should be evaluated under the process created in this section or under other project review and approval processes. A project proposal shall not be reviewed under the process created in this section if the department determines that the scale of the project raises concerns regarding public health and safety.

(c) A fish habitat enhancement project must be approved in one of the following ways in order to receive the permit review and approval process created in this section:

(i) By the department pursuant to chapter 77.95 or 77.100 RCW;

(ii) By the sponsor of a watershed restoration plan as provided in chapter 89.08 RCW;

(iii) By the department as a department-sponsored fish habitat enhancement or restoration project;

(iv) Through the review and approval process for the jobs for the environment program;

(v) By conservation districts as conservation district-sponsored fish habitat enhancement or restoration projects;

(vi) Through a formal grant program established by the legislature or the department for fish habitat enhancement or restoration;

(vii) Through the department of transportation's environmental retrofit program as a stand-alone fish passage barrier correction project or fish passage barrier correction portions of larger transportation projects;

(viii) Through a local, state, or federally approved fish barrier removal grant program designed to assist local governments in implementing stand-alone fish passage barrier corrections;

(ix) By a city or county for a stand-alone fish passage barrier correction project funded by the city or county;

(x) Through the approval process established for forest practices hydraulic projects in chapter 76.09 RCW; or

(xi) Through other formal review and approval processes established by the legislature.
(2) Fish habitat enhancement projects meeting the criteria of subsection (1) of this section are expected to result in beneficial impacts to the environment. Decisions pertaining to fish habitat enhancement projects meeting the criteria of subsection (1) of this section and being reviewed and approved according to the provisions of this section are not subject to the requirements of RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c).

(3)(a) A permit is required for projects that meet the criteria of subsection (1) of this section and are being reviewed and approved under this section. An applicant shall use a joint aquatic resource permit application form developed by the office of regulatory assistance to apply for approval under this chapter. The department of transportation shall use the department's online permit application system or a joint aquatic resource permit application form developed by the office of regulatory assistance to apply for approval under this chapter. On the same day, the applicant shall provide copies of the completed application form to the department and to each appropriate local government. Applicants for a forest practices hydraulic project that are not otherwise required to submit a joint aquatic resource permit application must submit a copy of their forest practices application to the appropriate local government on the same day that they submit the forest practices application to the department of natural resources.

(b) Local governments shall accept the application identified in this section as notice of the proposed project. A local government shall be provided with a 15-day comment period during which it may transmit comments regarding environmental impacts to the department or, for forest practices hydraulic projects, to the department of natural resources.

(c)(i) Except for forest practices hydraulic projects, the department shall, within 45 days, either issue a permit, with or without conditions, deny approval, or make a determination that the review and approval process created by this section is not appropriate for the proposed project. The department shall base this determination on identification during the comment period of adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated by the conditioning of a permit. Permitting decisions over forest practices hydraulic approvals must be made consistent with chapter 76.09 RCW.

(ii) For department of transportation fish passage barrier correction projects, the department of fish and wildlife shall,
within 30 days, either issue a permit, with or without conditions, deny approval, or make a determination that the review and approval process created by this section is not appropriate for the proposed project.

(d) If the department determines that the review and approval process created by this section is not appropriate for the proposed project, the department shall notify the applicant and the appropriate local governments of its determination. The applicant may reapply for approval of the project under other review and approval processes.

(e) Any person aggrieved by the approval, denial, conditioning, or modification of a permit other than a forest practices hydraulic project under this section may appeal the decision as provided in RCW 77.55.021(8). Appeals of a forest practices hydraulic project may be made as provided in chapter 76.09 RCW.

(4) No local government may require permits or charge fees for fish habitat enhancement projects that meet the criteria of subsection (1) of this section and that are reviewed and approved according to the provisions of this section, except that pursuant to chapter 86.16 RCW, local governments may impose requirements and/or charge fees for specific projects reviewed and approved according to this section only as necessary in order to comply with any applicable prerequisites for participation in the national flood insurance act, codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. Sec. 4001, et seq.

(5) No civil liability may be imposed by any court on the state or its officers and employees for any adverse impacts resulting from a fish enhancement project permitted by the department or the department of natural resources under the criteria of this section except upon proof of gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct.

Sec. 2. RCW 90.58.147 and 2019 c 150 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A public or private project that is designed to improve fish or wildlife habitat or fish passage shall be exempt from the substantial development permit requirements of this chapter when all of the following apply:

(a) The project has been approved by the department of fish and wildlife;
(b) The project has received hydraulic project approval by the department of fish and wildlife pursuant to chapter 77.55 RCW; and

(c) The local government has determined that the project is substantially consistent with the local shoreline master program. The local government shall make such determination in a timely manner and provide it by letter to the project proponent.

(2) Fish habitat enhancement projects that conform to the provisions of RCW 77.55.181 are determined to be consistent with local shoreline master programs.

(3) Public projects for the primary purpose of fish passage improvement or fish barrier removal shall be exempt from the substantial development permit requirements of this chapter.

Sec. 3. RCW 47.85.020 and 2015 3rd sp.s. c 17 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

The department must streamline the permitting process by developing and maintaining positive relationships with the regulatory agencies and the Indian tribes. The department can reduce the time it takes to obtain permits by incorporating impact avoidance and minimization measures into project design and by developing complete permit applications. To streamline the permitting process, the department must:

(1) Implement a multiagency permit program, commensurate with program funding levels, consisting of appropriate regulatory agency staff with oversight and management from the department.

(a) The multiagency permit program must provide early project coordination, expedited project review, project status updates, technical and regulatory guidance, and construction support to ensure compliance.

(b) The multiagency permit program staff must assist department project teams with developing complete biological assessments and permit applications, provide suggestions for how the project can avoid and minimize impacts, and provide input regarding mitigation for unavoidable impacts;

(2) Establish, implement, and maintain programmatic agreements and permits with federal and state agencies to expedite the process of ensuring compliance with the endangered species act, section 106 of the national historic preservation act, hydraulic project approvals, the clean water act, and other federal acts as appropriate;
(3) Collaborate with permitting staff from the United States army corps of engineers, Seattle district, department of ecology, and department of fish and wildlife to develop, implement, and maintain complete permit application guidance. The guidance must identify the information that is required for agencies to consider a permit application complete; 

(4) Perform internal quality assurance and quality control to ensure that permit applications are complete before submitting them to the regulatory agencies; and

(5) Implement a multiagency effort, in coordination with the department of ecology and the department of fish and wildlife, and work with the relevant federal environmental permitting agencies to streamline the acquisition of commonly needed environmental permits and approvals for department of transportation fish passage barrier correction projects. Expected results include developing programmatic permit options that simplify the application process, reduce paperwork, and reduce the amount of time and cost it takes to acquire these permits and approvals.