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**SENATE BILL 5876**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senator Fortunato

AN ACT Relating to establishing a streamlined grant application process for ecosystem investments; and adding a new section to chapter 79A.25 RCW.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 79A.25 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, covered agencies must coordinate to establish a streamlined application process for state voluntary funding programs addressing ecosystem investments in order to:

(a) Increase leveraging of local, state, and federal funding;

(b) Increase pace and scale of project completion;

(c) Expand capacity of local project proponents;

(d) Improve return on investment for member agencies;

(e) Achieve more equitable and climate resilient project investments; and

(f) Otherwise identify and implement administrative improvements for state voluntary funding programs addressing:

(i) Projects and activities consistent with the action agenda as defined in RCW 90.71.010;

(ii) Salmon protection, recovery, and restoration;

(iii) Watershed recovery;

(iv) Ecosystem recovery; and

(v) Water quality protection and restoration.

(2) Objectives of the streamlined application process must include:

(a) Improving grant application processes for applicants;

(b) Streamlining grant management processes for recipients;

(c) Improving connectivity and accountability between project proponents and agencies;

(d) Streamlining and improving the accuracy of reporting of accomplishments by recipients; and

(e) Improving collaboration and information sharing among grant managers.

(3) Covered agencies must achieve these objectives by:

(a) Utilizing an active interagency forum for grant making practitioners to share updates, develop common resources, leverage successes, and consider innovative approaches;

(b) Maintaining a sustained, regular dialogue and feedback loop with project proponents to identify administrative challenges, barriers, and gaps;

(c) Engaging agency leaders with appropriate decision-making authorities in the prioritization and implementation of potential actions or deliverables that will improve funding systems; and

(d) Securing and mobilizing resources needed to develop, maintain, and move forward a clear plan of work as agreed upon by covered agencies.

(4) Covered agencies may achieve these objectives by:

(a) Resourcing and focusing on improving administrative processes for voluntary funding programs within the existing authority of the agencies;

(b) Exploring and developing policy recommendations for improving administrative processes of such programs for consideration by the legislature;

(c) Developing joint application forms; or

(d) Establishing working groups, including inviting technical experts and stakeholders outside of covered agencies to support discussions, provide additional technical capacity, and improve coordination.

(5)(a) Covered agencies must develop and approve a biennial work plan that includes:

(i) Selection of priority projects and deliverables to be achieved;

(ii) Identification of representatives of member agencies to serve as an operations working group to support coordination and communication between working groups and agency leaders; and

(iii) Establishment of any additional working groups and associated agency staff to help support priority projects and deliverables.

(b) Substantive changes to the work plan may be made at any time as agreed upon by covered agencies.

(6) Beginning September 1, 2025, covered agencies must provide an annual report to the appropriate committees of the legislature on the actions of covered agencies and administrative improvements to state voluntary funding programs.

(7) For the purposes of this section, "covered agencies" include the Puget Sound partnership, the department of ecology, the recreation and conservation office, the department of fish and wildlife, and the state conservation commission.

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