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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 6281**

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

**By** Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Van De Wege, Warnick, Dozier, Mullet, and Short)

AN ACT Relating to investing in reforestation efforts following landscape-scale forest disturbances; adding a new section to chapter 76.14 RCW; creating a new section; and making appropriations.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Due to the changing climate, catastrophic wildfires are on the increase in the state's forests causing the release of carbon stored in the trees, soils, and other biomass. Climate-informed reforestation for landscape resilience is vital to growing more resilient forests that will help address the wildfire crisis, sequester carbon, and enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services.

(2) Congress responded to the national need to address the impacts of catastrophic wildfires when it passed the repairing existing public land by adding necessary trees (REPLANT) act as part of the infrastructure and jobs act of 2021. The REPLANT act seeks to scale up reforestation across national forests over the next five years and begin an historically significant restoration effort on national forestlands.

(3) A similar state-based effort is needed to replant burned forestlands to increase forest health and resilience, mitigate postfire vulnerabilities, and restore the ability of these lands to sequester carbon. The need is easily defined by the thousands of acres of forestlands that have been lost to wildfire during the past decade. Reforesting in the right place, at the right time, with the right species, and at appropriate scales can change the current trajectory. Reforestation of the state's burned forestlands is in the best interest of the state and consistent with Washington's efforts to combat climate change.

(4) The legislature recognizes the importance of providing additional funding for the postfire reforestation of public, private, and nonprofit forestland owners to expedite the replanting of burned forestlands and to restore the ability of these lands to sequester carbon.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 76.14 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the department shall administer a reforestation grant program designed to incentivize and invest in climate-informed reforestation after large forest stand replacement events such as wildfire, landslides, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes, and other natural catastrophic events that damage the ecoservices of natural or managed forests.

(2) The department must establish criteria for the grant program allowing land preparation, sourcing of seedling, reforestation, and additional efforts to promote seedling survival, which must include:

(a) A cost-share percentage with the grant recipient not to exceed 25 percent of the grant award, including any in-kind contributions;

(b) Minimum and maximum potential grant awards;

(c) Applicant eligibility criteria that must include tribal ownerships, nonprofit landowners and managers, industrial and nonindustrial private forestland owners, local governments, and other state agencies and must exclude public lands owned by the federal government or, to avoid a conflict of interest, lands managed directly by the department. Applicants are not restricted regarding whether they direct funds in their proposal to a program of the department to execute their reforestation program of work, such as either conservation corps capacity or purchase of seedling supply, or both;

(d) The prioritization of funds for direct reforestation efforts and may be utilized to support aspects of the reforestation pipeline to ensure sustainability of the program;

(e) Ensuring the applicant's projects are not required by law;

(f) Specific considerations for grant applicants proposing to include, as part of the project, the reforestation of riparian buffers, potentially unstable slopes, or other areas where harvest is restricted due to state regulations that were affected by the underlying catastrophic event; and

(g) Consideration of any relevant environmental justice assessments under RCW 70A.02.060.

(3) The department must limit the overall size of the program required under this section to the level of appropriations provided specifically for this purpose.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The sum of $10,000,000, or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated from the natural climate solutions account created in RCW 70A.65.270 to the department of natural resources for the purposes of the reforestation grant program created in section 2 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature recognizes the ongoing need for the department of natural resources to respond to the impacts of wildfire on forestlands managed by the department.

(2) The sum of $10,000,000, or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated from the natural climate solutions account created in RCW 70A.65.270 to the department of natural resources for postfire reforestation of the forestlands managed by the department. The department of natural resources must prioritize expenditures for the benefit of state trust lands.

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