

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5876

As of January 15, 2024

Title: An act relating to establishing a streamlined grant application process for ecosystem investments.

Brief Description: Establishing a streamlined grant application process for ecosystem investments.

Sponsors: Senator Fortunato.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/15/24.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP), the Department of Ecology (Ecology), the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and the State Conservation Commission (Commission) to coordinate to establish a streamlined application process for state voluntary funding programs addressing ecosystem investments.
- Requires PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission to develop and approve a biennial work plan.
- Requires PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission to provide an annual report to the Legislature, beginning September 1, 2025.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: The Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) was established as a state agency in

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2007 to coordinate and lead the effort to recover Puget Sound through a strategic, prioritized, science-based action agenda. PSP's boards—Leadership Council, Ecosystem Coordination Board, and the Science Panel—support and guide the agency in its charge of mobilizing and accelerating the science-based effort to protect and restore Puget Sound.

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is the state's environmental agency overseeing many state and federal laws designed to protect Washington's land, air, and water. Ecology is comprised of various programs, including:

- air quality;
- climate pollution reduction;
- environmental assessment;
- nuclear waste, hazardous waste, and toxics reduction;
- solid waste management and toxics cleanup;
- shorelands and environmental assistance;
- spill prevention, preparedness, and response; and
- water quality and water resources.

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) administers several grant programs for numerous boards and councils to create outdoor recreational opportunities, protect the state's wildlife habitat and farmland, and assist salmon recovery efforts. The RCO supports the following organizations:

- Recreation and Conservation Funding Board;
- Salmon Recovery Funding Board;
- Invasive Species Council;
- Governor's Salmon Recovery Office; and
- Habitat and Recreation Lands Coordinating Group.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) acts to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage Washington's wildlife, food fish, game fish, and shellfish. WDFW establishes the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife. As a part of its mandate to protect and preserve the state's fish and wildlife resources while providing recreational and commercial opportunities, WDFW may acquire and manage state lands.

The State Conservation Commission (Commission) is a state agency created to assist and guide conservation districts in preparing and implementing resource conservation programs. The Commission is governed by a ten-member board consisting of Governor appointees, other state agencies, and conservation districts. The Commission provides informational and technical assistance to conservation districts throughout Washington. The Commission also recommends and administers funding, distributes funds to conservation districts, and reviews conservation district budgets and annual reports.

Summary of Bill: Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission must coordinate to establish a

streamlined application process for state voluntary funding programs addressing ecosystem investments to:

- increase leveraging of local, state, and federal funding;
- increase pace and scale of project completion;
- expand capacity of local project proponents;
- improve return on investment for member agencies; and
- achieve more equitable and climate resilient project investments.

The streamlined application process addressing ecosystem investments should also identify and implement administrative improvements for state voluntary funding programs addressing projects and activities consistent with the PSP action agenda; salmon protection, recovery, and restoration; watershed recovery; ecosystem recovery; and water quality protection and restoration.

Objectives of the streamlined application process must include:

- improving and streamline grant application processes for applicants;
- improving connectivity and accountability between project proponents and agencies;
- streamlining and improving the accuracy of reporting of accomplishments by recipients; and
- improving collaboration and information sharing among grant managers.

PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission must achieve these objectives by:

- using an active interagency forum for grant-making practitioners to share updates, develop common resources, leverage successes, and consider innovative approaches;
- maintaining a sustained, regular dialogue and feedback loop with project proponents to identify administrative challenges, barriers, and gaps;
- engaging agency leaders with appropriate decision-making authorities in the prioritization and implementation of potential actions or deliverables that will improve funding systems; and
- securing and mobilizing resources needed to develop, maintain, and move forward a clear plan of work as agreed upon by covered agencies.

PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission may achieve these objectives by:

- resourcing and focusing on improving administrative processes for voluntary funding programs within the existing authority of the agencies;
- exploring and developing policy recommendations for improving administrative processes of such programs for consideration by the Legislature;
- developing joint application forms; or
- establishing working groups, including inviting technical experts and stakeholders outside of covered agencies to support discussions, provide additional technical capacity, and improve coordination.

PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission must develop and approve a biennial work plan that includes:

- selection of priority projects and deliverables to be achieved;
- 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
- establishment of any additional working groups and associated agency staff to help support priority projects and deliverables.

Substantive changes to the work plan may be made at any time as agreed upon by PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission. PSP, Ecology, RCO, WDFW, and the Commission must provide an annual report to the Legislature, beginning September 1, 2025, on the actions of the agencies and administrative improvements to state voluntary funding programs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill establishes a standardized grant application process. Different groups apply to different agencies for grants. The purpose of the bill is to establish a standardized grant application that could be applied to multiple agencies. It would make the review process easier if the grant application needs to be reviewed by multiple agencies.

OTHER: This bill considers a need to streamline the grant-making process. Project proponents have drawn attention to the different requirements they have to navigate when applying for grants. State agencies have convened an interagency group to consider improvements and streamlining of funding projects. This bill is similar to what the agencies are trying to achieve now, and the bill adds some limitations and additional administrative requirements. Ecology, WDFW, Puget Sound Partnership, Conservation Commission and Recreation and Conservation office are working to address similar concerns to the ones addressed in this bill. The work group should be given time to develop findings and recommendations.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Phil Fortunato, Prime Sponsor.

OTHER: Don Gourlie, Puget Sound Partnership; Brock Milliern, Recreation Conservation Office.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.