

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5475

As of February 10, 2025

Title: An act relating to maintenance for salmon recovery projects.

Brief Description: Concerning maintenance for salmon recovery projects.

Sponsors: Senators Dozier, McCune and Schoesler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Local Government: 2/10/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Salmon Recovery Funding Board to give consideration to projects that include a plan for ongoing maintenance or other methods for ensuring long-term effectiveness of the project.
- Creates the Salmon Recovery Project Maintenance Account.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Salmon Habitat Projects. The Governor's Salmon Recovery Office, located within the Recreation and Conservation Office, is responsible for coordinating the state strategy to allow for salmon recovery to healthy, sustainable population levels. Part of that responsibility is to coordinate and assist in the development, implementation, and revision of regional salmon recovery plans as part of the statewide strategy for salmon recovery.

Washington's system of watersheds is divided into eight Salmon Recovery Regions: Hood Canal, Lower Columbia River, Middle Columbia River, Northeast Washington, Puget Sound, Snake River, Upper Columbia River, and Washington Coast.

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

Within the eight Salmon Recovery Regions, the county, city, and tribal governments jointly designate areas for which a habitat project list is to be developed and designate a lead entity. The lead entity may be a county, city, conservation district, special district, tribal government, regional recovery organization, or other entity. Once selected, a lead entity must establish a committee to provide citizen-based evaluations of the projects proposed for the habitat project list.

Projects eligible for the list include restoration projects, protection projects, water quality projects, habitat-related mitigation projects, project maintenance, and monitoring activities. No project included on a habitat project list is mandatory and no private landowner may be forced to participate in any project. All areas covered by a project must be based on a water resource inventory area (WRIA), a combination of WRIs, or be an area agreed to by the counties, cities, and tribes.

Together, the lead entity and the committee evaluate the suggested projects, prioritize them, define the sequence for project implementation, and submit the habitat project list to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB).

Salmon Recovery Funding Board. SRFB, consisting of five voting Governor appointees and five state officials serving as ex officio nonvoting members, determines which projects receive funding. In evaluating, ranking, and awarding funds for projects and activities SRFB must give preference to projects, including those that:

- are based upon a limiting factors analysis;
- provide a greater benefit to salmon recovery based upon the stock status information;
- will benefit listed species and other fish species and preserve high quality salmonid habitat;
- are included in a regional or watershed-based salmon recovery plan; and
- are projects referenced in the action agenda developed by the Puget Sound Partnership.

In evaluating, ranking, and awarding funds for projects and activities, SRFB must also give consideration to projects that:

- are the most cost-effective;
- have the greatest matched or in-kind funding;
- will be implemented by a sponsor with a successful record of project implementation;
- involve members of the Washington Conservation Corps or the Veterans Conservation Corps; and
- are part of a regionwide list developed by lead entities.

Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups. The Legislature authorized the creation of Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups (RFEG) in 1990. Each of the 14 current RFEGs are separate nonprofit organizations led by their own board of directors and supported by their members. The statutory goals of RFEGs are centered around enhancing the salmon and steelhead resources of the state, including developing projects designed to supplement

fishery enhancement capability of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and maximizing volunteer efforts and private donations to improve the salmon and steelhead resources for all citizens.

Summary of Bill: In evaluating, ranking, and awarding funds for projects and activities, SRFB must give consideration to projects that include a plan for ongoing maintenance or other methods for ensuring long-term effectiveness of the project. SRFB may also provide funding to the lead entity or RFEG for ongoing maintenance of habitat projects to ensure long-term effectiveness.

The Salmon Recovery Project Maintenance Account is created in the state treasury and all receipts from funds provided by the Legislature for dedicated long-term maintenance for salmon recovery projects must be deposited in the account. The Legislature intends to provide an amount equal to 1 percent of total funds provided for salmon recovery projects for long-term ongoing maintenance of projects. Expenditures from the Salmon Recovery Project Maintenance Account may be used for maintenance of salmon recovery and habitat projects to ensure the habitat benefits of those projects are maintained over time.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2025.

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: Over the course of time with salmon habitat projects, something happens and the project gets washed away and even more habitat is lost. In some situations, there could be a simple fix to do light maintenance that would not cost very much and could preserve the existing projects. There are millions of dollars spent on these projects that are being washed away. This bill would take a portion of the total cost of the projects, 1 percent, to be put into a fund that can be accessed for maintenance for these projects.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Perry Dozier, Prime Sponsor; John Worthington, 303 S 5th Ave #53.

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