

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2600

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks

Title: An act relating to definitions of agricultural and forest land of long-term commercial significance.

Brief Description: Revising provisions relating to definitions of agricultural and forest land of long-term commercial significance.

Sponsors: Representatives Pruitt, Rayburn, Stevens, Sheldon, McMorris, R. Johnson, Grant, Schoesler and Lisk.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Natural Resources & Parks, February 4, 1994, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Pruitt, Chair; R. Johnson, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; McMorris, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Schoesler; Sheldon; B. Thomas and Valle.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Dunshee.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: The Growth Management Act defines "forest land" as land primarily useful for growing trees for commercial purposes and land that has long-term commercial significance for growing trees commercially.

The act defines "long-term commercial significance" to include natural features such as soil composition; the land's proximity to population areas; and the possibility of more intense uses of the land.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Growth Management Act definitions for these two terms are changed as follows:

"Forest land" means land that is primarily devoted to commercial timber production and that has long-term commercial significance.

The attribute of economic viability is added to the definition of "long-term commercial significance," as is consideration of surrounding uses and parcel sizes. Additionally, this phrase is defined to mean land that can be managed, economically and practically, for long-term commercial production.

An intent section establishes that the change in definitions is not intended to require counties that have already completed interim designations of natural resource lands to revisit those designations.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill required that land designations be in compliance with the definitions at the time the county or city adopts its comprehensive plan and development regulations. The substitute bill removes this language and establishes legislative intent that counties need not revisit their natural resource lands designations.

Fiscal Note: Requested January 25, 1994.

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

Testimony For: Snohomish County has designated isolated blocks of land as forest land. The blocks are surrounded by developed tracts; the residential use conflicts with production of forest products. These new definitions will help to clarify what these terms are really supposed to mean. Landowners need flexibility and incentives, rather than having designations forced on them. The original purpose of the designation was to capture, preserve, and protect real forest land. The other growth management hearing boards will use the Snohomish decision as a model. The Growth Management Act did not intend to lock up all trees in forest production forever.

Testimony Against: The theme of the Growth Management Act is local control; if Snohomish County is the only county where this is a problem, let it be addressed locally. The 32 counties that have completed their interim designations should not be forced to go back and revisit their work. Adding economic viability into the definition is problematic because it will vary over time and from manager to manager. Criteria in the definitions should be those that can be objectively assessed.

Witnesses: Mike Yeager, Washington Forest Protection Association; Keith Dearbon, Bogle and Gates; Noel Higa, Higa Engineering; Pete Overton, Washington Farm Forestry Association and Christmas Tree Growers; Fred Hart, Washington Farm Forestry Association; Dan Wood, The Umbrella Group; John Hempelmann, Cairncross and Hempelmann; Mike Alberg, Kittitas County Planning Commission (all in favor); Judy Turpin, Washington Environmental Council; Mike Ryherd, 1,000 Friends of Washington; Paul Parker, Washington State Association of Counties (all opposed); and Steve Wells, Department of Community Development.