

ANALYSIS OF HB 2186

House Agriculture & Ecology Committee

March 5, 1997

BACKGROUND:

As part of its management plan, the Puget Sound Action Team has provided funds to develop a voluntary, non-regulatory program for restoring wetlands. The program uses a geographic information system to identify how wetlands can provide or improve certain benefits such as flood control, fish and wildlife habitat, aquifer recharge, water quality, and water quantity. The program also identifies where wetlands are likely to work (provide functions) and where they are unlikely to work. The program was developed in the Stillaguamish water resource inventory area and will also be developed for the Nooksack and Snohomish water resource inventory areas.

Expanding this program to include other watershed functions may be a useful tool to assist policy makers to integrate local and state water quality laws and regulations.

SUMMARY:

Legislative findings are made that the current water quality regulatory system may become more effective and efficient if regulations are based on how watersheds function.

The Puget Sound Action Team is directed to develop a methodology to identify critical watershed functions within a water resource inventory area. The methodology must include use of a geographic information system. The methodology must also identify areas where functions are impaired, the causes of function impairment, and existing land uses. Critical watershed functions— is defined to include functions that protects or enhances water quality, water quantity, fish and wildlife, or flood control.

The Action Team is also required to select a watershed to conduct a case study. The purpose of the case study is to determine if the information generated from the methodology can be used to expedite agency permit decisions for wetland mitigation proposals and to expedite the planning process for growth management plans, flood control plans, and local shoreline plans. The Action Team must submit policy recommendations, including specific changes to state laws and rules, to the Legislature by December 1, 1999.