

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2186

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Agriculture & Environment, April 3, 1997

Title: An act relating to identifying critical ecological functions within a water resource inventory area.

Brief Description: Requiring a methodology to identify critical ecological functions within a WRIA.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Linville, Regala, Chandler and Blalock).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Environment: 3/27/97, 4/3/97 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Morton, Chair; Swecker, Vice Chair; Fraser, McAuliffe, Newhouse, Oke and Rasmussen.

Staff: Kari Guy (786-7437)

Background: The Puget Sound Action Team was created in 1996 to carry out the activities of the Puget Sound Water Quality Authority, including implementation of the Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan. One element of the 1994 Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan required the Department of Ecology to implement an ongoing wetland restoration program for specific sites in Puget Sound. To implement this requirement, the Department of Ecology has developed a pilot program in the Stillaguamish water resource inventory area (WRIA) using geographic information system (GIS) mapping. The GIS assists in identifying how wetlands can provide certain benefits such as flood control, fish and wildlife habitat, aquifer recharge, water quality, and water quantity. The GIS also identifies sites where wetland restoration would be most effective. The Department of Ecology is now expanding this program to the Snohomish and Nooksack WRIs.

It has been suggested that use of the wetlands restoration program GIS methodology could be expanded to expedite agency permit decisions on wetlands mitigation, and provide information needed for local government planning.

Summary of Bill: 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 use GIS technology to identify critical watershed functions, areas where functions are impaired, the causes of function impairment, and existing land uses. Critical watershed functions— is defined to include any hydrological functions that protect or enhance water quality, water quantity, fish and wildlife, or flood control.

The Puget Sound Action Team is also required to select a water resource inventory area and to conduct a case study in that watershed. 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 develop specific policy recommendations, based on the case study, and submit them to the Legislature by December 1, 1999.

The act is null and void if specific funding is not provided in the Omnibus Appropriations Act by June 30, 1997.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Past efforts at data collection in watersheds has been fragmented; this bill will consolidate all existing data into one GIS system. In watershed planning local governments will need good data to make good decisions.

Testimony Against: It is unclear who is responsible for collecting the data, and how the information will be used.

Testified: Tom Cowan, Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team (pro); Ron Shultz, National Audubon Society (pro); Mary Burke, Washington Cattlemen's Association (con).