

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 3098

As of February 23, 1998

Title: An act relating to coordination of environmental restoration and land acquisition.

Brief Description: Providing for the coordination of environmental restoration priorities and mitigation responsibilities.

Sponsors: Representative Sehlin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Environment: 2/25/98.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

Staff: Kari Guy (786-7437)

Background: The 1997-99 capital budget required all state agencies receiving appropriations in the capital budget and the transportation budget for land acquisition and environmental restoration or mitigation to coordinate those activities. The purpose of the requirement was to provide better coordination of environmental activities and to increase opportunities for shared natural resource management.

The primary focus of the budget requirement was to require natural resource agencies to coordinate environmental activities with the Department of Transportation in order for the department to begin a program for mitigation credits. Mitigation credits are credits earned by environmental mitigation or restoration activities at one site that may be applied to another site with a higher priority or less cost. The credits were not intended to reduce the department's mitigation obligations for construction projects but to reduce the cost of meeting those obligations or apply the mitigation efforts to more beneficial projects. The type of project that would qualify for mitigation credits is to be developed by a work group made up of state agencies with environmental regulation and mitigation responsibility.

Since the enactment of the coordination requirement, several projects have been undertaken by the Department of Transportation where mitigation credits have been earned and applied to specific highway construction projects in other parts of the state. The results of the coordination efforts are to be reported to the Legislature by the Office of Financial Management by December 1, 1998.

Summary of Bill: Natural resource agencies and any other state agency receiving appropriations from the state capital budget or the transportation budget for land acquisition or environmental restoration activities must coordinate those activities. When it is cost-effective and ecologically beneficial, mitigation credits earned by a project, including wetland banks or advance mitigation credits, may be applied to higher priority environmental restoration and enhancement activities. The coordination must also take into consideration the activities of local watershed groups.

A work group of state agencies is created to develop procedures for identifying and coordinating environmental mitigation and restoration activities. The work group reviews and summarizes the various funding sources for environmental programs in the capital and transportation budgets and develops a listing of proposed projects. The agencies must include incentives in grant and loan programs that are coordinated. The work group must create a database of construction projects to facilitate coordination and disseminate the information to all agencies. Each agency appropriated money for environmental projects must track the costs and benefits. The Office of Financial Management reports the results of the coordination efforts to the Legislature by December 31, 1999. The workgroup must also evaluate opportunities for providing incentives and outreach activities to facilitate coordination with other entities that provide either loans or grants for transportation corridor improvements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 4, 1998.

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