

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8019

As Passed Senate, March 12, 2001

Brief Description: Petitioning the secretary of agriculture to review certain policies of the conservation reserve enhancement program.

Sponsors: Senators Rasmussen, Parlette, Spanel and Oke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & International Trade: 2/28/01 [DP].

Passed Senate: 3/12/01, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Parlette, Sheahan, Snyder, Spanel and Swecker.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: The federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). To offer this program, the USDA must enter into cost-share agreements with states or their political subdivisions to provide incentives to owners of agricultural lands to undertake specific conservation and environmental objectives of that state and the nation.

The state of Washington has entered into a memorandum of agreement with USDA whereby landowners may enter into contracts for 15 years to plant native trees and shrubs on agricultural lands adjacent to streams. The specific environmental objectives of the program are to restore and enhance salmon habitat and improve water quality. The memorandum of agreement provides for 100,000 acres of land to be enrolled in the program. Currently, 1400 acres have been enrolled in the program.

As a matter of policy of the USDA, the program can only be offered on agricultural lands upon which annual crops or pasture is grown. Lands upon which perennial horticultural crops are grown do not currently qualify for enrollment in the program. There are numerous areas in the state where perennial horticultural crops are grown adjacent to streams that contain listed species of salmonids.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Legislature requests the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture to review its policies to allow the inclusion into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program lands that are currently being used to produce perennial horticultural crops.

Copies of the memorial are to be immediately transmitted to the President of the United States, the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, the President of the

U.S. Senate, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and to each member of Congress from the state of Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: There are areas in the state which produce perennial horticultural crops that are not currently eligible to enroll in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. If restoration and enhancement of these areas is important to the recovery of fish, a change in the federal eligibility criteria is needed.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Steve Meyer, Conservation Commission; Leslie Emrick, WSDA; Linda Johnson, Farm Bureau; Chris Cheney, Dairy Federation, Hop Growers; Jim Halstrom, WA State Horticultural Assn.

House Amendment(s): The Senate version requests the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture review its policies that allow inclusion of lands that produce perennial horticultural crops into the program. The House amendment specifically requests that these policies be altered to allow inclusion of lands currently used to produce perennial horticultural crops.