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**Natural Resources, Ecology &  
Parks Committee**

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**ESB 5179**

**Brief Description:** Studying forest health issues.

**Sponsors:** Senators Morton, Jacobsen, Sheldon and Stevens.

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill**

- The Forest Health Strategy Work Group is reconstituted and directed to hold five statewide meetings.

**Hearing Date:** 2/16/06

**Staff:** Jason Callahan (786-7117).

**Background:**

The Forest Health Strategy Work Group (Work Group) was created by the Legislature in 2004 and assigned the task of submitting their findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 30, 2004.

The legislation that created the Work Group asked its members to study opportunities to improve various forest health issues facing the state. This charge included formulating recommendations for certain issues, such as the proper incentives for helping landowners maintain healthy forests, alternatives for funding, amendments to the current forest health laws, and reviewing the current legal structure for noxious weeds to decide if it is an attractive model to use in the forest environment. Finally, the Work Group was asked to recommend whether their existence should continue into the future.

The Work Group was comprised of 14 members of diverse backgrounds. Among others, the Work Group was served by representatives of the Department of Natural Resources, the United States Forest Service, academic experts, private foresters, tribal interests, and small forest landowners. Most of the members were appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands, and the Department of Natural Resources provided staff support.

The Work Group completed its task on time and delivered the written report to the members of the former Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. The legislation creating the Work Group established a sunset date of June 30, 2005. The 2005 Legislature did not take action to extend the sunset date, so the authority for the Work Group expired.

**Summary of Bill:**

The expired Work Group is reconstituted with its original membership roster and goals. The Work Group is directed to hold a minimum of five meetings throughout the state so that public input can be gathered. The final recommendations of the Work Group are due to the Legislature by no later than December 30, 2006.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.