

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5009

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Agriculture & Rural Economic Development, January 27, 2005

Title: An act relating to the conservation assistance revolving account.

Brief Description: Changing conservation assistance revolving account provisions.

Sponsors: Senators Rasmussen and Schoesler; by request of Conservation Commission.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 1/13/05, 1/27/05 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5009 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Delvin, Jacobsen, Morton and Schoelser.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: In 2004, the conservation assistance revolving account (CARA) was established and \$500,000 was appropriated into the account. The account is subject to appropriation. The account is administered by the State Conservation Commission through local conservation districts. The purpose of the CARA is to aid in the financing of Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) projects.

Funds from the account may be loaned to landowners enrolled in CREP. Loans reimburse landowners for stream rehabilitation improvements and are repaid to the conservation commission by the federal government upon compliance with contract provisions.

CREP is a cooperative state-federal stream rehabilitation program that provides for planting of trees and shrubs in riparian areas, or fencing of these areas. The CREP program is available in areas which contain salmon or steelhead species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

The Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) is a similar stream rehabilitation program available from the federal government but for areas that do not contain federally listed species.

Conservation districts provide technical assistance to landowners to meet the requirements of the CCRP and CREP programs.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The authorized use of the conservation assistance revolving account is extended to the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill retains the account as an appropriated account.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Loans have averaged about \$7,400 and are generally repaid in twelve to eighteen months. The program leads to more conservation on the ground by providing short term funds to allow the improvements to be installed without creating a cash-flow shortage for the participant. The federal reimbursement is pledged to secure the loan and is paid directly to the Conservation Commission. The loan program is important to maintain the economic viability of agricultural producers. These federal programs are voluntary and available only as long as they are not mandated. Extending the program to lands that are eligible for the federal Continuous Conservation Reserve Program will provide improved habitat for non-listed species.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Mark Clark and Debbie Becker, Washington State Conservation Commission; Jim Jesernig and John Larson, Washington Association of Conservation Districts; and John Stuhlmiller, Washington Farm Bureau.