

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2468

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to improving community and urban forest conditions in Washington state.

Brief Description: Authorizing the department of natural resources to establish an inventory, conduct an assessment, and develop recommendations to improve community and urban forest conditions in Washington state.

Sponsors: Representatives VanDeWege, Warnick, Blake, Dickerson, Linville, Upthegrove, McCoy, Hinkle, Appleton, Lantz, Ormsby, McIntire, Roberts, Kenney, Hudgins, Loomis, Kretz, Kagi and Chase; by request of Department of Natural Resources.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/16/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Changes the authority for the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a community and urban forestry program from discretionary to mandatory.
- Requires the Department of Natural Resources to develop and conduct inventories and assessments of community and urban forests.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; VanDeWege, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Lantz, Loomis, McCoy, Nelson and Orcutt.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is authorized to establish a community and urban forestry program. Community and urban forests are identified as land within human

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settlements that does, or could, support trees. The program authorized at the DNR may include assistance to local governments to encourage proper tree maintenance, policy and program coordination assistance, and the provision of surplus equipment to local governments to aid urban forestry programs.

The DNR is also authorized to enter into agreements with non-profit tree-planting organizations and other entities with interests related to urban forestry. Funding can be received by the DNR from the federal government or by gifts and grants. The DNR may also charge fees for workshops and material distribution to raise funds. Once received, the DNR utilizes the funding for the purposes of forwarding urban and community forestry in the state.

Summary of Bill:

The authority for the DNR to conduct a community and urban forestry program is changed from discretionary to mandatory, and definitions are provided for the terms "community and urban forest assessment" and "community and urban forest inventory."

In addition to requiring the current program to continue, the DNR is also directed to conduct a statewide inventory of community and urban forests, conduct an urban forest assessment, and develop an implementation plan for the inventory and assessment of community and urban forests.

The uniform criteria for the inventory and assessment must be developed by the DNR with the advice of an advisory committee composed of various professionals with expertise related to urban forestry. Members of the advisory committee must be appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands and are eligible for travel reimbursement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The state's growing population leads to larger cities with citizens increasingly disconnected to nature. Urban forests soften the hard edges of cities, reduce summer temperatures, sequester carbon, decrease crime rates, and increase retail spending. The improvement in livability provided by trees makes people more comfortable in urban settings and decreases interest in moving further out into working lands.

Thriving urban forests take planning and maintenance, they do not happen by coincidence or accident. Many towns want vibrant urban forests, but lack the necessary resources. Planning

for the right tree in the right place improves safety and utility conflicts and reduces liability concerns over unhealthy or improperly located trees.

The bill provides financial and technical support without mandates. Large and small cities located on both sides of the Cascades benefit from additional assistance and the enhanced ability to obtain federal grants.

The bill facilitates partnerships with cities and the state, and provides a way for cities to partner with other groups interested in tree stewardship. Cities currently operating successful tree programs have all benefitted from DNR-provided assistance.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Garth Davis, Spokane Conservation District; Vicki Christiansen, Washington Department of Natural Resources; Miguel Perez, Audubon Society; and Dave Williams, Association of Washington Cities.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.