

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2157

As of March 16, 2009

Title: An act relating to the consolidation of certain salmon recovery activities and programs within the recreation and conservation office.

Brief Description: Consolidating certain salmon recovery activities and programs within the recreation and conservation office.

Sponsors: House Committee on General Government Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representative Springer; by request of Governor Gregoire).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/09, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 3/16/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: The Governor's Salmon Recovery Office and Regional Recovery Planning. The Legislature established the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office (GSRO) in 1998 to develop a state strategy for salmon recovery and to coordinate and assist in the development, implementation, and revision of regional salmon recovery plans. These regional salmon recovery plans are developed by regional salmon recovery organizations, which may be recognized in statute or by the GSRO.

The GSRO must produce a biennial state of the salmon report. The report must include information including a summary of habitat projects, salmon restoration efforts, harvest and hatchery management activities affecting salmon recovery, and measures of progress for fish recovery.

In addition to its mandatory duties, the GSRO has permissive authority including the authority to act as a liaison to the federal government regarding salmon recovery issues and provide recommendations to the Legislature on salmon recovery incentives and funding needs.

Salmon Recovery Funding. Established by the Legislature in 1999, the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRF Board) provides federal and state grant funds to protect and restore salmon habitat. Since 2000 the SRF Board has awarded over \$350 million in grants for over

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1,100 habitat projects. The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) provides administrative support to the SRF Board.

Lead Entities are local, watershed-based organizations that function to solicit, develop, prioritize, and submit habitat protection and restoration projects for funding to the SRF Board. Lead Entity funding is provided by the state Legislature through the RCO, which contracts with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to implement the Lead Entity program.

Forum on Monitoring Salmon Recovery and Watershed Health. The Forum on Monitoring Salmon Recovery and Watershed Health (forum) is an interagency group directed to coordinate actions related to monitoring salmon recovery and watershed health. The forum must also recommend a set of measures for use in the state of the salmon report that are easily understandable to the public. The RCO provides administrative support to the forum.

Watershed Planning. The Watershed Planning Act establishes a process through which local groups can develop and implement plans for managing and protecting local water resources and rights. The local groups authorized to develop watershed plans are organized by water resource inventory areas (WRIAs). A WRIA is, generally speaking, an area determined to be a distinct watershed. There are 62 WRIAs identified by the Department of Ecology (DOE). Each WRIA is identified by a number and may contain a local watershed planning group with an identified lead agency.

Once constituted, a WRIA is eligible for grant funding from DOE. There are funding opportunities available for both planning and implementation.

Summary of Bill: Several programs and functions relating to salmon recovery are consolidated within the RCO. The GSRO is abolished and its primary duties are transferred to the RCO. Additionally, the RCO must:

- administer all grant programs that support Lead Entities;
- by December 1, 2009, consult with specified entities to assess additional coordination and incentive opportunities between participants in salmon recovery and watershed planning within a watershed; and
- by December 1, 2009, along with the Office of Regulatory Assistance and specified entities, recommend a pilot project outside of Puget Sound that effectively integrates salmon recovery and watershed planning missions and objectives.

The RCO must produce a biennial consolidated report on salmon recovery and watershed health, to include the statewide status of salmon recovery and watershed health, a summary of projects funded by the SRF Board, and progress for monitoring salmon recovery and watershed health. The RCO must also include a status report on watershed planning efforts. This consolidated report replaces the current biennial state of the salmon report.

In addition to its current duties, the forum must adopt high-level indicators for salmon recovery and watershed health by December 1, 2009. By July 1, 2010, the forum must adopt the protocols for monitoring these indicators to ensure reporting consistency and agency compliance. The forum expires June 30, 2011.

By December 1, 2009, DOE must provide recommendations to the Legislature on grant programs relating to water quality and quantity that could be more effectively and efficiently funded through the SRF Board.

A 1998 statute creating an interagency work group to evaluate mitigation alternatives is repealed.

The bill is null and void if specific funding is not provided by June 30, 2009, in the Operating Budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The intent behind the bill is to consolidate salmon recovery efforts within the Recreation and Conservation Office, which align with its current work implementing salmon-related policy and funding programs. This consolidation will also result in cost savings. The companion bill in the Senate, SB 6004, was amended by the Natural Resources Committee, and the stakeholders support the Senate amendments.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Sara LaBorde, DFW; Bob Nichols, Governor's Office; Kaleen Cottingham, RCO.