

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6794

As of February 3, 2010

Title: An act relating to coordination of natural resource landowner incentive programs by the conservation commission.

Brief Description: Directing the state conservation commission to work with other agencies for implementation of agricultural landowner incentive programs.

Sponsors: Senators Haugen and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 2/02/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: The State Conservation Commission (Commission) is the agency responsible for the coordination of activities of 47 local conservation districts in the state. The Commission's board includes the Department of Ecology, the Department of Agriculture, and the Commissioner of Public Lands. Conservation districts are local governmental entities designated to assist in on-the-ground implementation of natural resource conservation programs with the consent of the land's owner or occupier. The bulk of the services provided by many conservation districts are to agricultural and small acreage lands.

An existing duty of the Commission is to encourage the cooperation and collaboration of state, federal, regional agencies, with conservation districts for implementation of natural resource conservation programs. Additionally, the Commission currently has the duty to assist in the planning and administration of programs affecting the conservation of natural resources with state and local agencies consistent with mutually developed procedures.

There is an array of federal, state administered, and state-funded programs aimed at the protection and enhancement of natural resources. There is interest in working to better coordinate the delivery of these multiple programs, target them to specific geographical areas, and enable them to focus on specific natural resource issues and concerns.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: As the Commission implements its existing authority for coordination of agricultural landowner incentive programs, the Commission is directed to work with state, federal, tribal, and local governments and with nongovernmental organizations to identify methods and opportunities to more efficiently and effectively implement landowner incentive programs. The Commission is directed to also work with agricultural landowners, including small acreage landowners, on incentive programs available for the protection, restoration, and enhancement of the state's natural resources.

The Commission is to consider approaches that:

- more efficiently uses limited state resources;
- improve the effectiveness of new and existing programs to achieve natural resource improvements while maintaining or enhancing the potential of working lands in the state;
- provide accountability in efficiency and resource effectiveness of the coordination of these programs; and
- better target and coordinate programs to address critical natural resource issues.

In implementing this act, the Commission is to consider the following approaches:

- work with conservation districts to engage participation of local landowners in these activities;
- coordinate with existing collaborative programs including the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, local watershed coordinating entities, local salmon recovery organizations, the Puget Sound Partnership and the Governor's natural resources cabinet;
- identify opportunities to target the delivery of incentive programs to specific geographic areas to address specific natural resource issues and concerns; and
- identify and coordinate multi-agency discussions that will lead to improvements to incentive programs;

The Commission is directed to periodically report to the Legislature and the Governor on;

- activities relating to coordination of incentive programs;
- progress in implementing programs on the ground;
- effectiveness of the coordinated approach;
- program efficiencies through improved coordination; and
- landowner engagement and participation in these programs.

The Commission is directed to also provide recommendations to the Legislature and Governor for any improvements in programs to accomplish the objectives of this section.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: None.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: In the Samish and elsewhere, the question was asked about what role the Conservation Commission and conservation districts could play in helping to coordinate the various state and federal programs that are available. Thus, the concept of targeted delivery of incentive programs came up that has a single point of contact that landowners could go to. Most landowners are reluctant to contact state regulatory agencies but feel comfortable in contacting their local conservation district. Under the GMA, landowners can't be required to restore habitat so it is important to work with landowners to get habitat improvement projects installed on private lands.

OTHER: Clarifying the roles envisioned for other state agencies, and bringing their expertise to the table, including the possibility of participating on a multi-disciplinary teams, needs to be considered. Also, there is a need to identify gaps in programs and to match up opportunities. Adding the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and another agricultural producer to the Conservation Commission may also help to improve coordination.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Jay Gordon, Washington State Dairy Federation; Nate Pamplin, DFW.

OTHER: Ron Schultz, Washington State Conservation Commission.