

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8017

As of January 20, 2010

Brief Description: Requesting that the restoration of sustainable, healthy forests be a national priority.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen, Morton, Kline and Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 1/18/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Staff: Sherry McNamara (786-7402)

Background: Forest health has been defined in law as "the condition of a forest being sound in ecological function, sustainable, resilient, and resistant to insects, diseases, fire and other disturbance, and have the capacity to meet landowner objectives."

In 2007 the Legislature designated the Department of Natural Resource (DNR) as the state's lead agency responsible for implementing a comprehensive program to improve forest health. The forest health law makes DNR focal in promoting cooperation between the state and the federal government on maintaining healthy forests.

In October 2009 the Northwest Environmental Forum on Eastside Forest Health invited federal, state, tribal, and private forestland managers to discuss a strategy to restore and maintain the dry forests of Eastern Washington, where elevated levels of tree mortality and damage are contributing to elevated forest fire risks.

Summary of Bill: The Senate Joint Memorial requests that the President and the United States Congress:

- elevate the restoration of healthy, sustainable forests as a national priority;
- establish a framework that facilitates active forest management on all ownerships, informs the public of the benefits of maintaining working forests, integrates service delivery for the various programs and authorities administered by federal agencies, and recognizes the values and contributions of forests in federal climate change, renewable energy, and water legislation and policies;
- respond to the urgent need for collaborative, community-supported Forest Restoration and Wildfire Threat Reduction actions that emphasize "anchor collaborative;"

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- fully support and fund current Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative and the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition collaborate efforts; and
- support longer (ten to 20 years) Forest Service stewardship contracts on larger acreages, with adequate funding to complete required reviews and documentation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The health of our Eastern Washington forests is critical. The federal forest lands are in dire health. There needs to be long lasting approaches taken to reverse the damage and destruction of the forestland. The approach should be broad based across the entire landscape with landowners working together for the benefit of forest health. There is a real urgency around the eastside forest health and fire risk. Catastrophic fires are a reality and have a major impact on wildlife, timber, and public costs. The Northwest Environmental Forum was attended by over 60 individuals who came up with an actionable plan and major findings on forest health. These issues go to the core of what is facing our northeastern forestland owners. It is past time to take bold landscape-level steps to ecosystem restoration. The U.S. Forest Service has a tool called Stewardship Contracting that treats large landscapes aggressively, however, they need the recognition and the funding to do the environmental reviews and documentation.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Bill Robinson, The Nature Conservancy; Brian Boyle, University of Washington; Tim Boyd, Vaagan Brothers Lumber.