HOUSE BILL REPORT
SJM 8005

As Passed House:
April 17, 2019

Brief Description: Supporting the continued research, development, production, and application of biochar from our forests and agricultural lands.

Sponsors: Senators Short, Van De Wege, Warnick, Palumbo, Brown, McCoy, Braun, Liias, Schoesler, Hunt, Wilson, C., Wilson, L., Rolfes, Das and Rivers.

Brief History:
Committee Activity:
Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources: 3/15/19, 3/22/19 [DP].
Floor Activity:
Passed House: 4/17/19, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Affirms the Legislature's support for biochar research, including research into the production of biochar and research into applications for biochar.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chapman, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Kretz, Orcutt, Ramos, Schmick, Springer and Walsh.

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

Biochar is a fine-grained charcoal left behind after pyrolysis of crop residues, livestock manures, or other organic materials. Pyrolysis is the high-temperature processing of organic materials in the absence of oxygen.

Biochar is used in multiple applications, including as a soil amendment and in sewage and wastewater treatment. Researchers have found that biochar applied to wet soils can decrease

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the production of methane and nitrous oxide. Other research has shown that biochar can be useful for restoring degraded soils because of its ability to bind to heavy metals.

Summary of Bill:

The Senate Joint Memorial affirms the Legislature's support for the biochar research efforts of the United States Forest Service, the Agricultural Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington State University, the Department of Ecology, and other institutions. These research efforts include research to produce biochar from the removal of wildfire fuel loads, from waste agricultural products, and from other waste biomass destined for landfills or combustion.

The Senate Joint Memorial also affirms the Legislature's support for the research of biochar as an animal feed, remediation tool, landscaping material, and soil amendment for forest and agricultural lands.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are a number of different uses for biochar: as a soil amendment; to improve crop yields; as a building material; and in cosmetic products, among others. Biochar is good for the triple bottom line; it offers financial, environmental, and social benefits. Biochar represents a tool that is commercially viable to manage different waste streams, and to create a high-value product at the other end of the process.

Human-made biochar that dates back 2,000 years has been found in the Amazon rainforest. A given acreage of Pacific Northwest forest can only store so much carbon in standing timber, which typically peaks at 100 years of age for Douglas Fir. At a 45-year timber harvest cycle, waste begins to be produced, and when that waste breaks down, carbon is given off. However, when that waste is converted to biochar, the biochar keeps the carbon locked up.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Baraka Poulin, Baraka Energy; and Greg Rock, Carbon Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.