

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6545

As of February 11, 2020

Title: An act relating to the voluntary stewardship program.

Brief Description: Concerning the voluntary stewardship program. [**Revised for 1st Substitute:** Adding counties to the voluntary stewardship program.]

Sponsors: Senators Zeiger, Takko, Warnick, Fortunato, Becker and Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Local Government: 1/30/20, 2/04/20 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/10/20.

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resets the date to join the Voluntary Stewardship Program to July 1, 2021.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6545 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Takko, Chair; Salomon, Vice Chair; Short, Ranking Member; Honeyford and Lovelett.

Staff: Bonnie Kim (786-7316)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Jed Herman (786-7346)

Background: The Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) was created in 2011 and allows participating counties to develop local work plans that use voluntary and incentive-based tools, as an alternative to regulation, to protect critical areas and agricultural lands. Counties had to opt in by early 2012, and 27 counties chose to participate.

Counties participating in VSP create a work plan that is approved by the Washington State Conservation Commission and then implement the plan by recruiting local landowners to

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participate in incentive-based stewardship activities. Counties report their progress to the Conservation Commission.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): The date to join the VSP is reset from January 2012 to July 1, 2021.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

- Amends the title to read: "Adding counties to the voluntary stewardship program."

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 24, 2020.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Local Government): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This bill offers a good way to have incentive-based tools to encourage county participation. The fiscal note assumed that every county would join and that assumption may have inflated the numbers. Whatcom County really struggled with this program and opening the program will allow them to participate again. The VSP committee has been heavily involved and is working with farmers to improve and enhance lands in our county. It would be helpful to have other counties join the good works of the 27 participating counties. This program is working to improve and enhance the economic viability of those counties.

CON: When the VSP was created, the time limit was intentional to that we could see what happened after the program. But there is no good data to review the success of the program. We do not know whether and to what degree these programs are accomplishing the intended goals.

Persons Testifying (Local Government): PRO: Senator Hans Zeiger, Prime Sponsor; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau; Michael Shaw, Pierce County; Jay Gordon, Farmer.

CON: Bryce Yadon, Futurewise.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Local Government): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute (Ways & Means): PRO: We are in strong support and are here to answer any questions. Farm Bureau supports the program, we think there may be three counties interested, therefore the fiscal impacts will not be too large.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Michael Shaw, Pierce County; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.