
Transportation Committee

HB 1934

Brief Description: Allowing tribal governments to participate in exchange agreements without certain restrictions.

Sponsors: Representatives Fey, Robertson and Taylor; by request of Department of Transportation.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes the requirement that a tribal government provide the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with a waiver of their tribal sovereign immunity and agree not to place the property in trust status in order to participate in an exchange agreement with the WSDOT for the transfer of property requiring environmental mitigation.

Hearing Date:

Staff: Jennifer Harris (786-7143).

Background:

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) may enter into exchange agreements to convey properties under its jurisdiction that serve as environmental mitigation sites as full or partial consideration for the grantee assuming all future maintenance and operation obligations and costs required to permanently maintain and operate the environmental mitigation site. The WSDOT may enter into these exchange agreements with local, state, and federal agencies; tribal governments; and private, non-profit nature conservancy corporations.

Property transfers must be made by quitclaim deed, or other form of conveyance, executed by

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the Secretary of the WSDOT, and must expressly restrict the use of the property to a mitigation site consistent with preservation of the functions and values of the site. Property transfers must also provide for the automatic reversion to the WSDOT if the property is not used as a mitigation site or is not maintained in compliance with applicable permits, laws, and regulations relating to the maintenance and operation of the mitigation site.

Tribal governments are only eligible to participate in an environmental mitigation site exchange agreement with the WSDOT if they meet the following additional requirements:

1. provide the WSDOT with a valid waiver of their tribal sovereign immunity from suit to allow the WSDOT to enforce the terms of the exchange agreement or quitclaim deed in state court; and
2. agree that the environment mitigation site will not be placed in trust status.

Sovereign immunity prevents a sovereign from being sued without its consent. Tribal governments, state governments, and the federal government have sovereign immunity. A waiver of immunity grants consent to be sued.

When property is placed into trust status, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior acquires title to property and holds it for the benefit of a Native American tribe or individual tribal members. The use of trust lands is governed by the tribes, subject to certain federal restrictions, and the land is usually not subject to state laws.

During the 2021-23 fiscal biennium, the additional requirements placed on tribal governments do not apply to any exchange agreement with a tribal government for the acquisition of real property needed by the WSDOT for the State Route 167/State Route 509 Puget Sound Gateway project.

Summary of Bill:

To be eligible to participate in an environmental mitigation site exchange agreement, tribal governments are no longer required to provide the WSDOT with a waiver of their tribal sovereign immunity or to agree that the environmental mitigation site will not be placed in trust status. (However, the WSDOT may still, at its discretion, require these contractually.)

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2022.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.