
**Rural Development, Agriculture &
Natural Resources Committee**

2SSB 5253

Brief Description: Implementing the recommendations of the pollinator health task force.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Liias, Warnick, Das, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Lovelett, Rolfes, Saldaña, Van De Wege and Wagoner).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Reestablishes the Pollinator Health Task Force to assist with implementation of the prior task force's recommendations and the pollinator health strategy.
- Requires the Department of Agriculture to submit a plan for the implementation of the pollinator health strategy to the Legislature by December 31, 2021.
- Implements various recommendations from the 2020 Pollinator Health Task Force report to the Legislature.

Hearing Date: 3/17/21

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

In 2019, the Legislature directed the Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to establish a pollinator health task force including representatives from state agencies, agricultural industries, Washington State University (WSU), pesticide distributors and applicators, conservation organizations, beekeeping organizations, and others. The task force was tasked with developing

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a state pollinator health strategy that includes, among other things, a research action plan to focus state efforts on preventing pollinator losses, and recommendations for legislative actions necessary to implement the strategy.

The pollinator task force issued its recommendations in November 2020. The task force grouped its recommendations into five broad categories: habitat, pesticides, education, managed pollinators, and research.

Pollinator Habitat.

Legislation passed in 2019 also directed the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Transportation, State Parks, and the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board to consider pollinator habitat when managing lands or habitat.

Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program.

Legislation passed in 2020 directed the State Conservation Commission to develop a Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program in consultation with the WSDA, WSU, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service within the United States Department of Agriculture.

Summary of Second Substitute Bill:

Pollinator Health Task Force.

The Department of Agriculture (WSDA) must create and chair a Pollinator Health Task Force (Task Force) that includes representatives from various state agencies, agricultural industries, Washington State University (WSU), pesticide distributors and applicators, conservation organizations, beekeeping organizations, a youth representative from an organization that encourages students in agricultural education, and two members of the public.

The Task Force must assist with the development of an implementation plan to implement the state pollinator health strategy and must assist with implementation of the recommendations of the previous task force. The WSDA must submit the implementation plan to the Legislature by December 31, 2021.

Washington State Department of Agriculture Pollinator Health Program.

Subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the WSDA must undertake a number of specified actions related to pollinator health, including:

- evaluate and develop communication protocols that would increase communication between beekeepers, farmers and growers, and pesticide applicators;
- continue and maintain partnerships with federal agencies and neighboring states to promote pollinator health;
- educate the public through plant nurseries about the necessity for blooming nectar plants to

- be available to pollinators throughout their respective active seasons; and
- survey registered beekeepers to determine whether the current apiary program should be expanded to include apiary inspections or registration of apiary yards.

Washington State Department of Agriculture Pesticide Program.

The WSDA must continue to evaluate and update, as necessary, pesticide regulatory and education programs focused on measures to protect pollinator health. In addition, and subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this purpose, the WSDA must also take other specified actions related to pesticides and pollinator health, including:

- evaluate and adapt pesticide training and drift reduction technical assistance programs to include protection measures for pollinators;
- evaluate the inclusion of pollinator protection course materials for pesticide license credit issuance; and
- report to the Legislature on recommendations for measures to mitigate the risks of harm to bees and other pollinators from the use of neonicotinoid pesticides.

Nonnative Managed Bumble Bees.

It is unlawful for a person to introduce or move nonnative managed bumble bees into this state to be used in open-field agricultural use.

Pollinator Extension Education and Outreach Program.

The WSU extension program must develop a pollinator extension education and outreach program and develop a statewide, science-based, pollinator education plan to educate beekeepers, agricultural producers, land managers, licensed pesticide applicators, other professionals, and the public.

Public Works Projects—Pollinator Habitat.

If a public works project includes landscaping, at least 25 percent of the planted area must be pollinator habitat to the extent practicable. The WSDA, in consultation with the State Conservation Commission, must develop landscape standards guidelines that include a list of native forage plants that are pollen-rich or nectar-rich and beneficial for all pollinators, including honey bees, and how pollinator plants and habitat should be designed and maintained after installation.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife—Pollinator Habitat.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must evaluate various restoration techniques with the goal of improving habitat for native pollinators. The WDFW must update its riparian habitat recommendations to encourage development of pollinator habitat where practicable when making habitat improvements or for riparian restoration.

State Conservation Commission—Pollinator Habitat Grants.

The State Conservation Commission (Commission) must establish a small grants program, subject to the availability of amounts appropriated, to provide funding to conservation districts to educate residents and community groups in urban, suburban, and rural nonfarm areas about the value of pollinator habitat for both managed and native pollinators. Educational efforts should include the benefits of habitat diversity, especially pollen-rich and nectar-rich flowering forbs and shrubs. Preference for pollinator plants should be given to native plants or noninvasive, nonnative plants. Criteria to rank applicants include, for example, demonstrated funding needs, value to at-risk native pollinators, and plans for long-term maintenance.

In addition, the Commission, in administering the Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program, must prioritize applicants that create or maintain pollinator habitat, compared to other grant applications that perform similarly under the prioritization metrics developed by the Commission.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on March 12, 2021.

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