

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2463

As Reported by House Committee On:

Agriculture and Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to conducting a review of salmon planning and recovery efforts.

Brief Description: Conducting a review of salmon planning and recovery efforts.

Sponsors: Representatives Lekanoff and Pollet.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture and Natural Resources: 1/30/24, 1/31/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to conduct a performance audit of salmon planning and recovery efforts in two watersheds in Eastern Washington and two watersheds in Western Washington.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Chapman, Chair; Morgan, Vice Chair; Reeves, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kloba, Kretz, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Schmick and Springer.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

Salmon Recovery.

Several species of salmon, as well as Puget Sound steelhead trout, are listed as either

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threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Governor's Salmon Recovery Office, administered through the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), is responsible for coordinating state strategy for salmon recovery. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is responsible for managing the state's fish and wildlife resources. Several other state agencies, including the Departments of Ecology and Natural Resources, the State Conservation Commission, and the RCO, either have regulatory authority with respect to various aspects of natural resource and land management related to salmon recovery, administering grant funding for salmon recovery projects, or both.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) is a statutorily created body consisting of eight members from the Senate and eight members from the House of Representatives, with no more than four members from each house from the same political party. The JLARC conducts a variety of analyses including performance audits, program evaluations, and sunset reviews.

At the end of each legislative session in an odd-numbered year, JLARC must develop and approve a performance audit work plan for the ensuing biennium. The work plan must include a description of each audit and its cost. When considering the work plan, JLARC must consider:

- whether a newly created or significantly altered program warrants continued oversight because of a significant fiscal impact or a high risk of not succeeding;
- whether implementation of the program has significantly failed to meet its goals and objectives;
- whether a follow-up audit would ensure that previous recommendations for improvements were implemented; and
- whether JLARC is required to do an audit by enacted legislation.

Summary of Bill:

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) must conduct a performance audit of salmon planning and recovery efforts within four watersheds in Washington. Two of the watersheds identified by JLARC for the performance audit must be located east of the Cascade Mountains, and two must be located west of the Cascade Mountains. Within these watersheds, the performance audit must identify:

- the local, state, federal, and comanagers involved in recovery efforts and other relevant entities whose work may impact recovery efforts;
- the extent to which recovery efforts include shared and measurable goals for recovery and the extent to which work is coordinated;
- the extent to which scientific data is defined consistently, shared, and used to inform decision-making;
- plans for assessing progress made in implementing recovery efforts; and
- funding for recovery efforts, as well as constraints imposed by funding sources.

The audit must be completed by December 31, 2026.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Washington is celebrating 50 years of salmon comanagement since the Boldt Decision was issued. This study will help assess where Washington is regarding salmon recovery and help policymakers become salmon talkers. There is a need for metrics and to understand who is in charge of the salmon, but it is hard to know what metrics to consider until it is clear where Washington stands with respect to salmon recovery. Salmon are important to both the economy of Washington and the identity of Washingtonians. There is a need for a statewide plan. Current bureaucratic processes put Tribes in the same position as the public instead of in the role of comanagers and makes upholding treaty obligations difficult. The Lummi Tribe have been stewards of the land since time immemorial and continue work to recover salmon and habitat, including adopting a 10-year hatchery plan to return salmon populations to the more abundant numbers of the 1980s. The Lummi Tribe has also been engaged in fixing habitat problems that the Tribe did not create. There is hope that this analysis would lead to greater access to salmon recovery funding for Tribes, actual recovery of salmon, and finding a different system that honors the role of Tribes as comanagers.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There is a need for a review of salmon recovery in Washington, but this is not the way to do it. The Boldt Decision is not decisive on commercial use of land. There are already metrics and millions of dollars have been spent on culverts and landscaping projects purported to be salmon habitat recovery projects. Local Tribes do have authority with regard to salmon recovery projects.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Debra Lekanoff, prime sponsor; and Lisa Wilson, Lummi Nation.

(Other) John Worthington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.