

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6281

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks, January 29, 2024

Title: An act relating to investing in reforestation efforts following landscape-scale forest disturbances.

Brief Description: Investing in reforestation efforts following landscape-scale forest disturbances.

Sponsors: Senators Van De Wege, Warnick, Dozier, Mullet and Short.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/25/24, 1/29/24 [DPS-WM].

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Establishes a reforestation grant program at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to incentivize reforestation after large forest stand replacement events including wildfires and landslides.
- Appropriates \$10 million for the reforestation grant program and \$10 million for reforestation on DNR lands impacted by wildfires.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6281 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Van De Wege, Chair; Salomon, Vice Chair; Muzzall, Ranking Member; Liias, Shewmake, Short, Stanford, Wagoner and Warnick.

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages a number of different categories of land, each for a specific purpose and under different management requirements. This includes approximately 3 million acres of federally granted lands and state forestlands, which the DNR manages to support common schools, counties, and other public institutions.

The Natural Climate Solutions Account (NCSA) is an account established to increase the resilience of the state's waters, forests, and other vital ecosystems to the impacts of climate change and conserve working forestlands at risk of conversion. Funding must be used for projects and activities that will increase forest and community resilience to wildfire, improve forest health, prevent emissions by preserving natural and working lands from the threat of conversion, or increase support to small forestland owners through the Forestry Riparian Easement Program and the Family Forest Fish Passage Program.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): DNR shall administer a reforestation grant program designed to incentivize and invest in climate-informed reforestation after large forest stand replacement events such as wildfire, landslides, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes, and other natural catastrophic events that damage the ecoservices of natural or managed forests. DNR must establish criteria for the grant program including a cost-share percentage, minimum and maximum potential grant awards, applicant eligibility, and the prioritization of funds. Entities that may be eligible for a grant include tribal ownerships, nonprofit landowners and managers, industrial and nonindustrial private forestland owners, local governments, and other state agencies. Projects that are required by law, and lands owned by the federal government or lands managed by DNR are not eligible for the grant program. Additional criteria for the grant program include the reforestation of riparian buffers and potentially unstable slopes, and consideration of any relevant environmental justice assessments.

An appropriation of \$10 million from the NCSA is provided for the reforestation grant program. An additional \$10 million from the NCSA is provided to the DNR for postfire reforestation of the forestlands managed by the DNR. The DNR must prioritize reforestation expenditures for the benefit of state trust lands.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS COMMITTEE (First Substitute):

Specifies that land preparation, sourcing of seedling, reforestation, and efforts to promote seedling survival are eligible activities under the reforestation grant program. Clarifies that an eligible project does not include an applicant's project that is required by law. Modifies the appropriation for reforestation grants and postfire reforestation of forestlands managed by the Department of Natural Resources by removing references to the fiscal year. Removes changes to the Natural Climate Solutions Account specifically allowing investments in climate-informed reforestation of lands affected by natural disturbances and reforestation on Department of Natural Resources lands.

Appropriation: The bill contains appropriations totaling \$20,000,000 from the NCSA.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2024.

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: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: A managed forest helps fight climate change. Wood products sequester carbon and are renewable. The bill would allow burned over areas, including riparian areas and unstable slopes, to be reforested. Over the past 20 years over 2 million acres of forestlands have burned, and there is a need to replant those forestlands. The bill contains incentives for reforestation and can capitalize on seedling production investments at DNR. This bill is consistent with the Climate Commitment Act funding and will result in the planting of more trees. After certain intense fires, natural regeneration may not be sufficient. The bill will result in more resilient forests that will store more carbon. The bill should be modified to include DNR's forest resilience program. It should be clear that the grant funds are not to be used where reforestation is required. The NCSA account may not need to be amended.

OTHER: The state should maintain hazard fuel reduction, and while there is a need for fire to create space, fires should be managed.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kevin Van De Wege, Prime Sponsor; Tom Davis, WA Forest Protection Association; Heath Heikkila, American Forest Resource Council; Csenka Favorini-Csorba, Department of Natural Resources; Paula Swedeen, Conservation Northwest.

OTHER: John Worthington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.