
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5846

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Salomon, Llias, Lovelett, Saldaña, and Van De Wege)

READ FIRST TIME 01/26/24.

1 AN ACT Relating to beaver ecosystem management; adding new
2 sections to chapter 77.12 RCW; and creating a new section.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that beavers play a
5 significant role in maintaining the health of ecosystems in
6 Washington. The legislature recognizes that beavers are a keystone
7 species that provide habitats and resources that other species,
8 including salmon, steelhead, trout, waterfowl, shorebirds, deer, elk,
9 songbirds, bats, cougars, bears, and amphibians need to survive.
10 Beavers provide benefits to watersheds including expanding habitat
11 diversity, buffering flood and drought conditions, increasing surface
12 water and groundwater recharge, moderating in-stream water
13 temperatures, increasing diversity of riparian vegetation, and
14 providing refugia during and after wildfires. Widely hailed as
15 ecosystem engineers, beavers provide similar benefits to salmon
16 recovery projects, such as improving water quality, reducing stream
17 gradients, and restoring degraded riparian area, without costly
18 capital investments and technical engineering. Protecting beavers and
19 beaver habitat provides significant ecosystem benefits, improves the
20 natural ecological functions of Washington's watersheds, and builds
21 climate resilience.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 77.12

2 RCW to read as follows:

3 (1) The department must create and implement a statewide beaver
4 ecosystem management plan. The plan must define the role that beavers
5 play in maintaining the health of ecosystems and biodiversity in
6 Washington including, but not limited to, providing benefits in
7 watersheds including natural ground and surface water storage, stream
8 temperature moderation, improved water quality, reduced stream
9 velocities, reduced stream sediment transport, moderation of extreme
10 flood events, habitat and biodiversity provision, reduced nutrient
11 transport, increased pollutant and greenhouse gas sequestration, and
12 the improvement or creation of habitat for other species. The plan
13 must define beavers as a keystone species and prioritize the
14 provision of resources and services to resolve human conflict with
15 beaver activity including education, coexistence, relocation, and as
16 a last resort, lethal removal services. The plan must recognize that
17 people are part of ecosystems and that ecosystems cross
18 jurisdictional lines. The plan must fulfill the mandate identified in
19 RCW 77.04.012 by including recommendations and guidance for:

20 (a) Protecting beavers and reducing beaver mortality in priority
21 habitat, freshwater habitats of special concern identified in WAC
22 220-660-100, as that section existed on January 1, 2024, and fish and
23 wildlife conservation areas as defined in WAC 365-190-130, as that
24 section existed on January 1, 2024;

25 (b) Managing beaver conflicts and mitigating property damage
26 caused by beavers, provided that conflict management at compensatory
27 mitigation sites as defined by WAC 220-660-030, as that section
28 existed on January 1, 2024, must consider the goals and objectives of
29 the site;

30 (c) Providing education and outreach to landowners and community
31 members regarding the benefits of beaver habitat and available tools
32 and options to mitigate or reduce conflict;

33 (d) Providing technical and financial assistance for protecting
34 beaver habitat in situ or participating in a beaver relocation
35 project;

36 (e) Identifying locations where the reintroduction or protection
37 of beaver provides benefits to salmon habitats;

38 (f) Restricting recreational harvest at release sites and
39 monitoring beaver survival and establishment at release sites;

1 (g) Building partnerships with land managers, local governments,
2 tribes, the scientific community, recreational beaver trappers,
3 riverscape restoration practitioners, and other stakeholders; and

4 (h) Involving volunteer and nonprofit organizations in beaver
5 education and outreach programs.

6 (2) Nothing in this section prevents any landowner from taking
7 immediate action within the scope of existing law necessary to
8 protect life, property, and built infrastructure including, but not
9 limited to, homes, structures, roads, culverts, and bridges.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 77.12
11 RCW to read as follows:

12 (1) The department shall establish a grant program to provide:

13 (a) Beaver education and outreach;

14 (b) Technical assistance and resources to assist landowners in
15 living with beavers on their property; and

16 (c) Support for beaver relocation programs consistent with the
17 beaver ecosystem management plan adopted under section 2 of this act
18 and the relocation requirements as specified in RCW 77.32.585.

19 (2) The department shall establish grant criteria, including
20 eligibility and cost-share requirements, for participating in the
21 program.

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