

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6549

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development, February 6, 2014

Title: An act relating to creating demonstration projects for preserving agricultural land and public infrastructure in flood plains.

Brief Description: Creating demonstration projects for preserving agricultural land and public infrastructure in flood plains.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, Hatfield and Pearson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development: 2/06/14 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Hatfield, Chair; Honeyford, Ranking Member; Brown, Eide, Hobbs and Schoesler.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: Rivers are receiving deposits of gravel and other sedimentation from up stream. This is causing the river beds to rise and the water levels, consequently, to rise. This is putting some rivers over and under their dikes, and flooding and eroding lands adjacent to them. This erosion and channel relocation affects farm and dairy lands as well as previously planted riparian buffers, public highways, and public access. Another consequence of sedimentation is that some river deltas are becoming essentially channel-less, turning into areas threaded by numerous rivulets. This can impede fish runs.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must jointly convene a stakeholder group to examine the experience in river management of Canada's Fraser River. The group must then set benchmarks and a timetable for the group's progress toward reaching the goals of protection of agricultural lands, restoration or enhancement of fish runs, and protection of public infrastructure and recreational access.

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

The stakeholder group must develop and implement the two demonstration projects that test various sediment management strategies and techniques to reach these goals; one demonstration project is in Grays Harbor County and one is in Whatcom County.

Any gravel removed by a project must be used, at the discretion of WSDA and DNR, for local fish programs, by adjacent property owners, or by a local tribe for its use or sale.

Reporting to the Legislature is required by December 31, 2014, and annually thereafter.

Staffing is provided jointly by WSDA and DNR.

Funding is first from federal grants, then federal loans, state grants and loans, and private donations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: There is tremendous damage to agricultural, residential, and recreational land from the non-management of rivers. When rivers are managed, farmland stays intact, the sediments do not impede fish runs, and the roads and other infrastructure can be maintained. We need to take the lessons already learned from the Fraser River and apply them here, if successful. Inclusion of other groups is acceptable so long as a demonstration project is actually done.

OTHER: The Department of Fish and Wildlife and environmental and land preservation groups should also participate.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Dan Wood, WA Dairy Federation.

OTHER: Michael Rechner, DNR.