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SENATE BILL 5766

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State of Washington

63rd Legislature

2013 Regular Session

By Senators Hobbs, Hatfield, Honeyford, Schoesler, and Brown

Read first time 02/14/13. Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development.

1 AN ACT Relating to improving relationships between agricultural  
2 producers and state regulatory staff; adding a new section to chapter  
3 89.08 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that relationships  
6 between agricultural producers and personnel assigned to state  
7 regulatory agencies are in need of improvement in a number of areas in  
8 the state. The legislature further finds that many of the staff at  
9 state regulatory agencies lack experience and background with  
10 agricultural operations and producers. Furthermore, the legislature  
11 finds agricultural producers lack familiarity with the expectations  
12 placed upon state regulatory personnel.

13 The legislature finds the state conservation commission includes  
14 representatives of state regulatory agencies and conservation  
15 districts, but does not have representatives of general agricultural  
16 organizations or commodity groups. However, the legislature finds that  
17 the state conservation commission and local conservation districts have  
18 had a long-term experience in successfully working with agricultural

1 producers and state agency personnel on a range of natural resource  
2 issues to address concerns regarding the use and stewardship of the  
3 state natural resources.

4 The purpose of this act is to initiate and test processes that seek  
5 to improve mutual understandings and build improved working  
6 relationships between agricultural producers and state regulatory  
7 personnel.

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 89.08 RCW  
9 to read as follows:

10 (1) The commission shall initiate a state forum that includes  
11 persons designated by the directors of state regulatory agencies, and  
12 agricultural producers nominated to the commission by state and  
13 regional agricultural organizations to:

14 (a) Design a process to be instituted at the county or regional  
15 level on a pilot project basis that would provide an opportunity for  
16 local producers to meet-and-greet the field staff assigned by the  
17 regulatory agency to that area of the state and begin a dialogue that  
18 improves communication and mutual understanding and cooperation;

19 (b) Design a process whereby complaints can be received, evaluated,  
20 and form the basis for possible change to agency procedures;

21 (c) Examine and propose revision of existing training provided to  
22 and procedures followed by field enforcement staff of state regulatory  
23 agencies that interact with agricultural producers; and

24 (d) Examine policy issues that create tensions between state  
25 regulatory agencies and agricultural organizations and propose methods  
26 to relieve these tensions, including recommending to the legislature  
27 policy changes.

28 (2) The state forum may request assistance from local conservation  
29 districts to host and conduct local forums on a pilot basis to initiate  
30 a dialogue between state regulatory agency staff assigned in a  
31 particular county or region of the state, and agricultural and rural  
32 landowners in that county or region. The commission may provide  
33 incentives to those conservation districts that engage in the pilot  
34 program through the commission's existing district governance and  
35 accountability program. The commission shall seek involvement from at  
36 least one district from each side of the crest of the Cascade mountains

1 each year. The commission shall consult with legislators to assist in  
2 determining which counties may benefit from the establishment of these  
3 forums.

4 (3) State regulatory agencies shall cooperate with the commission  
5 and participate in the state and local forums. In conducting this  
6 pilot program, the commission may test various options including  
7 establishing yearly or periodic forums.

8 (4) The commission shall submit a report by December 1, 2017, to  
9 the committees with jurisdiction over agricultural issues in the house  
10 of representatives and the senate on the results of the forums and the  
11 pilot program, and shall also submit any recommendations to further  
12 decrease tensions and improve working relationships and understanding  
13 between the agricultural landowners and the staff assigned to state  
14 regulatory agencies.

15 (5) As used in this section, "state regulatory agencies" means the  
16 department of ecology, the department of agriculture, the department of  
17 fish and wildlife, and the department of natural resources.

18 (6) This section expires July 1, 2018.

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