AN ACT Relating to biodiversity conservation; creating new sections; and making an appropriation.

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

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. The legislature finds that the state of Washington possesses a diversity of plants and animals in a diverse array of ecologically distinct regions. This biological diversity and its role in forming the diverse landscapes of the state are an important part of the high quality of life shared by all of the state’s citizens and its visitors. By better understanding the variety and status of living organisms and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur, conservation efforts can be more effective in ensuring that this wealth of biological diversity is enjoyed by current and future generations.

The legislature further finds that extensive scientific work has been completed by both public and private entities to map the state’s ecoregions and address ecoregional planning issues, by academic institutions, by state agencies such as the departments of natural resources and fish and wildlife, and by nongovernmental organizations such as the nature conservancy. However, these existing information
sources are not complete, and this information may not be sufficiently coordinated or accessible and useful to the public or policymakers. Similarly, there is no single entity responsible for development and implementation of a coordinated state strategy to conserve remaining functioning ecosystems and restore habitats needed to maintain Washington’s biodiversity. There should be a comprehensive review to identify the state’s needs for biodiversity data and conservation, and to coordinate development, dissemination, and use of existing information.

There is also a need to strengthen the state’s nonregulatory approaches to biodiversity conservation, including incentives for voluntary conservation efforts by private landowners. Incentives should be a major element of the state’s overall biodiversity conservation strategy.

The legislature further finds that resource management on a single-species or single-resource basis has proven to be costly, acrimonious, and ultimately ineffective at either preserving the state’s biodiversity or allowing reasonable economic development.

Therefore, the purpose of this act is to create a temporary committee to develop recommendations to the governor and the legislature to establish the framework for the development and implementation of a statewide biodiversity conservation strategy, to replace existing single-species or single-resource protection programs.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. (1) The interagency committee for outdoor recreation is authorized to grant up to forty-five thousand dollars, on a competitive basis, to conduct the review of biodiversity programs as described in this section.

(2) The successful grantee must convene and facilitate a biodiversity conservation committee that will review existing biodiversity mapping and research programs in Washington conducted by state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other entities, as well as reviewing programs and projects in other states.

(3) The biodiversity conservation committee must develop recommendations for a state biodiversity program that includes:

(a) Creation and composition of a standing public/private council to oversee design, development, and implementation of the program;
(b) Identification of a lead agency to support and facilitate development and implementation of a state biodiversity conservation plan;
(c) Methods to improve state agency and nongovernmental organization coordination and cooperation;
(d) Consistent definitions of the state’s ecoregions and an integrated system of data management and mapping of the state’s biodiversity;
(e) The state role for housing and administering biodiversity data and making the data accessible to local governments and others;
(f) A public education and outreach component that includes the production of a visual overview of Washington’s ecoregions;
(g) Methods to ensure continuing stakeholder involvement;
(h) Methods to provide technical assistance to support state and local government land management; and
(i) Identification of the timeframes and funding needed to implement the program.

(4) The purpose of the state biodiversity program is to develop and implement an ongoing biodiversity conservation strategy to maintain Washington’s biodiversity in perpetuity, within the context of human activities on the landscape, to prevent additional species from being listed as endangered or threatened, and to create a more predictable environment in which to conduct economic activities.

(5) The successful grantee must invite representatives of the following groups to participate on the biodiversity conservation committee:
(a) State agencies, including the departments of fish and wildlife, natural resources, and ecology, the Puget Sound action team, and the state salmon recovery office;
(b) Federal land management and natural resource agencies;
(c) Local governments;
(d) Tribes;
(e) Property owners, including forestry and agriculture;
(f) Business, including land development;
(g) Academia and research institutions; and
(h) Conservation nongovernmental organizations.

(6) The biodiversity conservation committee must choose a chair from among its members and adopt operating procedures.
(7) The grant agreement must be conditioned to require that at least an amount of funding equal to the state grant be applied to the project from nonstate sources.

(8) The grantee must provide a final report describing its review and recommendations to the governor and the appropriate standing committees of the senate and the house of representatives by October 1, 2003.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. The sum of forty-nine thousand dollars, or as much thereof as may be necessary, is appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2003, from the general fund to the interagency committee for outdoor recreation for the purposes of this act.

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