

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6381

As of January 28, 2014

Title: An act relating to watershed councils in the Puget Sound basin.

Brief Description: Concerning watershed councils in the Puget Sound basin.

Sponsors: Senators Ranker and Rolfes.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Environment & Telecommunications: 1/29/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Staff: Jan Odano (786-7486)

Background: There are several local and state governmental organizations, councils, or committees that, as part of their mission, address issues and concerns regarding the cleanup and restoration of Puget Sound.

Puget Sound Partnership (PSP). The PSP was created in 2007 to oversee cleanup and restoration of the environmental health of Puget Sound by 2020. The PSP consists of a Leadership Council (Council), Ecosystem Coordination Board, Puget Sound Science Panel, and an executive director.

The Council leads the PSP and its duties include the following: adopting and implementing an Action Agenda; allocating Puget Sound recovery funds and making grants; providing progress and other reports, including biennial budget requests; setting strategic priorities and benchmarks; and acting as the regional organization for Puget Sound salmon recovery.

The PSP Action Agenda is the framework for restoring Puget Sound. The Action Agenda identifies key programs, local priorities, and specific actions that must be implemented to maintain progress in meeting the goal of restoring Puget Sound by 2020. To ensure the timely development of the Action Agenda, the PSP is required, in part, to use existing watershed programs and to work with local watershed groups, tribes, cities, counties, and others who develop and implement the watershed plans for those watersheds draining into certain Puget Sound area marine waters.

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.

Local Integration Organizations. The PSP also works to integrate local efforts contributing to the progress of the PSP's Action Agenda. The purpose of local integration organizations is to provide a voice to communities in guiding the implementation of PSP's action agenda priorities and to prioritize local actions. The participants include local governments, tribes, nonprofit organizations, watershed, marine resource, and salmon recovery groups, citizens, businesses, and others. The Council has recognized local integrating organizations in nine geographic regions of the state.

The Governor's Salmon Recovery Office. The Governor's Salmon Recovery Office is responsible for coordinating the state strategy to allow for salmon recovery to healthy, sustainable population levels. Part of that responsibility is to coordinate and assist in the development, implementation, and revision of regional salmon recovery plans as part of the statewide strategy for salmon recovery.

The Recreation and Conservation Office works with the Governor's Salmon Recovery Office to prepare a biennial report on salmon recoveries and watershed health. The report must include a summary from the Department of Ecology on watershed planning efforts, and a summary from PSP on salmon recovery and watershed planning.

Watershed Planning and Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIA). Local governments are authorized to conduct watershed planning to develop and implement plans for managing and protecting local water resources and rights. If a local government conducts watershed planning, they must include a water quantity element, and may include water quality and habitat elements and the recommending minimum instream flows. The local groups authorized to develop watershed plans are organized by WRIAs. A WRIA is, generally speaking, an area determined to be a distinct watershed. Within the WRIAs, there are eight Salmon Recovery Regions: Hood Canal, Lower Columbia River, Middle Columbia River, Northeast Washington, Puget Sound, Snake River, Southwest Washington, Upper Columbia River, and Washington Coast. Within those eight regions, the counties, cities, and tribal governments jointly designate areas for which a habitat project list must be developed, and designate the lead entity that will be responsible for submitting the habitat project list. The lead entity may be a county, city, conservation district, special district, tribal government, regional recovery organization, or other entity.

Hood Canal Coordinating Council (HCCC). The HCCC is the local management board for the rehabilitation program for Hood Canal. The Legislature designated aquatic rehabilitation zones for areas where there are serious environmental or public health concerns for the surrounding marine water bodies. Aquatic rehabilitation zone one includes all of the watersheds that drain to Hood Canal south of Tala Point in Jefferson County to Foulweather Bluff in Kitsap County. The Council must work collaboratively with the HCCC on Hood Canal specific issues. The PSP is the lead agency for the Hood Canal Rehabilitation Program.

Marine Resources Committees (MRCs). MRCs were authorized by the Legislature in 2007. Certain counties bordering Puget Sound and all coastal counties are authorized to establish an MRC. The MRC must address the needs of the marine ecosystem local to that county. A county legislative authority, in cooperation with tribes, cities, and local special districts, may create an MRC. The PSP is the coordinating entity for the MRCs created by counties located

within the Puget Sound basin. The Department of Fish and Wildlife serves the coordinating role for MRCs created by a coastal county.

Summary of Bill: The PSP must review the role of watershed councils in accomplishing the goals and objectives of Puget Sound recovery. The PSP must hold meetings with representatives of watershed councils, including the HCCC, MRCs, Local Integrating Organizations, salmon recovery organizations, and other county watershed councils, as well as representatives of Puget Sound stakeholder interests, and federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies engaged in Puget Sound recovery work.

The PSP must structure the meetings to obtain views and recommendations on issues including:

- determining the most effective structure for watershed councils with respect to their specific mission;
- achieving greater coordination or integration when more than one council is working in the same geographic region;
- maximizing the role and effectiveness of watershed councils implementing restoration projects and programs prioritized with in the PSP Action Agenda; and
- identifying statutory provisions that interfere with the effectiveness of the councils.

The PSP must compile a summary of the meetings and recommendations for legislative, budgetary, and administrative actions to strengthen the role of watershed councils in Puget Sound recovery. The summary and recommendation must be provided to the appropriate legislative committees by January 1, 2015.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 26, 2014.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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