RCW 43.23.300 Program to promote and protect pollinator habitat and pollinator species. (1) The department shall establish a program to promote and protect pollinator habitat and the health and sustainability of pollinator species. As funds are made available, the program must provide technical and financial assistance to state agencies, local governments, and private landowners to implement practices that promote habitat for all pollinators, including native species, as well as beekeeper and grower best management practices. The program must be administered in coordination with the apiary program established in chapter 15.60 RCW, the honey bee commission authorized in chapter 15.62 RCW, and programs administered by the conservation commission and conservation districts.

(2) Subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this specific purpose, and in consultation with the department of fish and wildlife, the department must:

(a) Review, in consultation with Washington State University, education needs related to pollinator education and develop a plan that outlines the goals related to pollinator education and the necessary partners, personnel, and other resources;

(b) Evaluate and complete an analysis of critical impacts and needed best management practices for managed and wild pollinators. The department shall lead this effort in partnership with Washington State University, and in collaboration with the department of fish and wildlife and the state conservation commission. The effort must utilize the framework established in the state's managed pollinator protection plan as a guide for formal recommendations and education opportunities. The analysis must address food insecurities, habitat loss, virus and disease, pests, and pesticides, which may play a role in pollinator health decline. The department shall make the resources produced pursuant to this subsection available to the public on the department's website, as well as through Washington State University and the state's conservation districts;

(c) Document, in consultation with Washington State University, the bee species within the state and map their distributions as practicable;

(d) Provide economic and environmental impacts of weed listing and categorization on pollinator health to county noxious weed control boards in consultation with the state noxious weed control board and annually submit a report to the noxious weed control board describing pollinator health issues;

(e) Provide materials, where practicable and in consultation with Washington State University, about certification programs that support pollinator health, biodiversity, and low-impact pesticide application to the public;

(f) Educate the public through plant nurseries about the necessity for blooming nectar plants to be available to wild and managed pollinators throughout their respective active seasons;

(g) Survey registered beekeepers to determine whether the current apiary program should be expanded to include apiary inspections or registration of apiary yards;

(h) Continue and maintain partnership with federal agencies and neighboring states to promote and enhance the implementation of the national strategy to promote the health of honey bees and improve pollinator health;

(i) Increase the availability of pollinator-related resources on the department's website, as practicable, and other state agencies' websites as appropriate;

(j) Review guidelines on state-managed lands to protect native pollinators and improve transparency for state-managed land areas which may permit managed honey bees so that impacts to wild pollinators from honey bees may be minimized; and

(k) In consultation with the department of revenue, review the open space taxation act and provide recommendations to the legislature, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, on options to include pollinator habitat in the current open space property tax classification. [2021 c 278 s 3; 2019 c 353 s 2.]

Purpose—Intent—2021 c 278: "(1) The purpose of this act is to implement the recommendations of the pollinator health task force created by section 3, chapter 353, Laws of 2019, entitled "Recommendations of the Pollinator Health Task Force - for Pollinator Health in Washington" (November 2020).

(2) The task force provided recommendations to help prioritize and enact policy changes for pollinators in Washington. The recommendations are organized under five broad categories: (a) Habitat; (b) pesticides; (c) education; (d) managed pollinators; and (e) research.

(3) The task force met for the first time the same week that the Asian giant hornet was first discovered in Washington and the week after the Houdini fly was also reported for the first time in Washington. Asian giant hornets primarily hunt honey bees and destroy entire honey bee hives. The Houdini fly threatens native mason bee populations as well as managed mason bees. Washington is home to over 400 different species of native bees, 65 species of butterflies, as well as moths, wasps, beetles, flies, and hummingbirds. The loss of pollinators, managed and unmanaged, can lead to decreased yields of many fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Washington is currently the top producer in the United States of apples, sweet cherries, alfalfa, blueberries, and pears. In Washington state, honey bees and other pollinators are responsible for the production of tree fruits, small fruits, and other crops.

(4) The legislature intends by this act to implement various recommendations from the pollinator health task force to protect and expand the habitat upon which pollinators depend, by providing technical and financial assistance to public and private landowners, and by coordinating with state agencies and local governments in promoting practices to ensure sustainable, healthy populations of managed and native pollinators." [2021 c 278 s 1.]

Findings—Intent—2019 c 353: "The legislature finds that more than three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about thirty-five percent of the world's food crops depend on pollinators to reproduce. In Washington state, honey bees and other pollinators are responsible for the production of tree fruits, small fruits, and other crops, with the value in 2016 of crops pollinated by honey bees exceeding three billion dollars. The legislature further finds that, beyond agriculture, pollinators are keystone species in the terrestrial ecosystems of Washington, with fruit and seeds derived from insect pollination providing a major part of the diet of numerous bird and mammal species. The state has experienced pollinator habitat loss through property conversion, fragmentation, and degradation of land, and with the state's population continuing to grow at a fast pace, the additional loss of habitat is a significant concern.

Therefore, the legislature intends by this act to initiate a concerted effort to protect and expand the habitat upon which pollinators depend, by providing technical and financial assistance to public and private landowners, and by coordinating with other state agencies and local governments in promoting practices to ensure sustainable, healthy populations of managed and native pollinators." [2019 c 353 s 1.]