

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

ESSB 5121

Title: An act relating to the establishment of a carbon storage program.

Brief Description: Establishing a carbon storage program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Parks & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senator Hargrove).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Meeting Date: February 16, 2000.

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Josh Weiss, Counsel (786-7129)

Background:

While scientific debate does exist, it is widely thought that global atmospheric carbon levels have risen in recent years. Some scientists argue that this increase in carbon has been caused by the burning of fossil fuels which emit carbon dioxide, and by changing land use patterns which eliminate naturally occurring "carbon sinks" such as forests.

Living forests absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, storing carbon in the wood mass of the trees themselves, and facilitating the storage of carbon in forest soils. It is thought that forests can mitigate recent increases in atmospheric carbon levels.

A carbon emission trading program would provide a financial incentive for landowners to maintain long term forest production. Such a program would allow landowners to sell credits on a free market to persons who emit carbon. This could only be accomplished through a state standardized and certified program.

Several other states and countries have either implemented or are in the process of implementing carbon sequestration programs.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development is directed, along with the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Ecology, to evaluate carbon credit programs, parameters for a successful carbon program, and to develop recommendations for a Washington carbon program. The departments are also directed to study existing Washington State programs, including the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program that would

facilitate a program and guarantee a market for carbon credits. They will report their findings and recommendations by December 1, 2000.

An advisory group will assist the departments. The advisory group is made up of a representative from the timber industry, agriculture community, industrial business community, private landowners, and an expert on carbon sequestration from the University of Washington.

The provisions of the bill expire on December 31, 2000.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 9, 2000.

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

Passed Senate: 1/21/2000, 40-1