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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5846**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Salomon, Lillas, Lovelett, Saldaña, and Van De Wege)

1 AN ACT Relating to beaver ecosystem management; adding new  
2 sections to chapter 77.12 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that beavers play a  
5 significant role in maintaining the health of ecosystems in  
6 Washington. The legislature recognizes that beavers are a keystone  
7 species that provide habitats and resources that other species,  
8 including salmon, steelhead, trout, waterfowl, shorebirds, deer, elk,  
9 songbirds, bats, cougars, bears, and amphibians need to survive.  
10 Beavers provide benefits to watersheds including expanding habitat  
11 diversity, buffering flood and drought conditions, increasing surface  
12 water and groundwater recharge, moderating in-stream water  
13 temperatures, increasing diversity of riparian vegetation, and  
14 providing refugia during and after wildfires. Widely hailed as  
15 ecosystem engineers, beavers provide similar benefits to salmon  
16 recovery projects, such as improving water quality, reducing stream  
17 gradients, and restoring degraded riparian area, without costly  
18 capital investments and technical engineering. Protecting beavers and  
19 beaver habitat provides significant ecosystem benefits, improves the  
20 natural ecological functions of Washington's watersheds, and builds  
21 climate resilience.

1        NEW SECTION.    **Sec. 2.**    A new section is added to chapter 77.12

2    RCW to read as follows:

3        (1) The department must create and implement a statewide beaver  
4    ecosystem management plan. The plan must define the role that beavers  
5    play in maintaining the health of ecosystems and biodiversity in  
6    Washington including, but not limited to, providing benefits in  
7    watersheds including natural ground and surface water storage, stream  
8    temperature moderation, improved water quality, reduced stream  
9    velocities, reduced stream sediment transport, moderation of extreme  
10   flood events, habitat and biodiversity provision, reduced nutrient  
11   transport, increased pollutant and greenhouse gas sequestration, and  
12   the improvement or creation of habitat for other species. The plan  
13   must define beavers as a keystone species and prioritize the  
14   provision of resources and services to resolve human conflict with  
15   beaver activity including education, coexistence, relocation, and as  
16   a last resort, lethal removal services. The plan must recognize that  
17   people are part of ecosystems and that ecosystems cross  
18   jurisdictional lines. The plan must fulfill the mandate identified in  
19   RCW 77.04.012 by including recommendations and guidance for:

20        (a) Protecting beavers and reducing beaver mortality in priority  
21   habitat, freshwater habitats of special concern identified in WAC  
22   220-660-100, as that section existed on January 1, 2024, and fish and  
23   wildlife conservation areas as defined in WAC 365-190-130, as that  
24   section existed on January 1, 2024;

25        (b) Managing beaver conflicts and mitigating property damage  
26   caused by beavers, provided that conflict management at compensatory  
27   mitigation sites as defined by WAC 220-660-030, as that section  
28   existed on January 1, 2024, must consider the goals and objectives of  
29   the site;

30        (c) Providing education and outreach to landowners and community  
31   members regarding the benefits of beaver habitat and available tools  
32   and options to mitigate or reduce conflict;

33        (d) Providing technical and financial assistance for protecting  
34   beaver habitat in situ or participating in a beaver relocation  
35   project;

36        (e) Identifying locations where the reintroduction or protection  
37   of beaver provides benefits to salmon habitats;

38        (f) Restricting recreational harvest at release sites and  
39   monitoring beaver survival and establishment at release sites;

1 (g) Building partnerships with land managers, local governments,  
2 tribes, the scientific community, recreational beaver trappers,  
3 riverscape restoration practitioners, and other stakeholders; and

4 (h) Involving volunteer and nonprofit organizations in beaver  
5 education and outreach programs.

6 (2) Nothing in this section prevents any landowner from taking  
7 immediate action within the scope of existing law necessary to  
8 protect life, property, and built infrastructure including, but not  
9 limited to, homes, structures, roads, culverts, and bridges.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 77.12  
11 RCW to read as follows:

12 (1) The department shall establish a grant program to provide:

13 (a) Beaver education and outreach;

14 (b) Technical assistance and resources to assist landowners in  
15 living with beavers on their property; and

16 (c) Support for beaver relocation programs consistent with the  
17 beaver ecosystem management plan adopted under section 2 of this act  
18 and the relocation requirements as specified in RCW 77.32.585.

19 (2) The department shall establish grant criteria, including  
20 eligibility and cost-share requirements, for participating in the  
21 program.

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