

Weekly Legislative Update: **Forests**

Issue Team Chair: Sherri Dysart

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Bills We Oppose

[SB 5961](#) Incentivizing the use of biochar in government contracts. Bill passed the Senate on 2/10/22: yeas, 49; nays, 0; absent, 0; excused, 0.

The bill is now moving through the House. A public hearing was held on 2/21/22 in the House Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations. I testified in opposition to the bill as it is currently written. **Thanks to all who signed in CON on this bill.**

Comments: We have a concern that this bill is incentivizing a private company's efforts to develop a biochar/biomass plant in Port Angeles. There is concern that the bill will allow the harvesting of trees to supply feedstock for the plant, rather than using logging slash or other wood waste. Regardless of the benefits of biochar, these biochar operations could lead to stripping massive amounts of vital organic material out of forests.

I have asked the House Rules Committee **not to advance the bill to the floor for a vote. Two other organizations also asked that the bill not advance: Kitsap Environmental Coalition and 350 WA.**

Bills We Support

[SB 5619](#) Conserving and restoring kelp forests and eelgrass meadows in Washington state. Bill had a public hearing on 1/20/22 in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks Committee. It was referred to Senate Ways & Means on 1/28/22. Referred to Rules Committee; on 2/10/22, the 2nd substitute bill was placed on third reading. **The bill passed:** yeas, 49; nays, 0; absent, 0; excused, 0.

The bill is now moving through the House. It had a public hearing on 2/18/22 in the House Committee on Rural Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources. It was passed out of committee on 2/23/22; referred to the House Appropriations Committee. A public hearing was held on 2/25/22 in the Appropriations Committee. It is now scheduled for executive session on 2/28/22. **This bill has strong support.**

Comments: Both native and non-native types of eelgrass are essential for restoring Puget Sound and Coastal Washington. It is in these back eddies and sloping beaches where eelgrass provides shelter for migrating fish where they can escape diving ducks, seals and other predators. The loss in Puget Sound of any kind of eelgrass is partly responsible for the decline of Pacific salmon in our state. The goal to conserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of kelp and eelgrass meadows by 2040 should include both native and non-native species of eelgrass.

How You Can Be Involved

- Local Leagues in Washington have action chairs that coordinate action teams. Some local Leagues have environmental teams to take action locally. Contact your local League action chair to find out and join.
- You may also express your opinion on legislation with the LWVWA issue chairs. We will take your perspectives under considerations as we determine our support for legislation and prepare testimony. Sherri Dysart, Forests Issue Chair, sdysart@lwwva.org.