



HB 3337 - Conservation Outcomes

Summary: The bill promotes outcome-based approaches to conservation policy and consideration of the full range of nature's benefits in decisions about land management and infrastructure development. It also offers flexibility for compliance with existing regulations through alternative pathways that produce better environmental results at lower cost and encourages programs that reward landowners for contributing to state and local conservation goals. Similar legislation won committee approval in 2011 (House) and 2012 (Senate).

Background: Most environmental laws were passed decades ago to address narrow and specific problems like industrial pollution or unplanned development. They tend to be administered by individual agencies that work in isolation, often duplicating effort or working at cross purposes. Although these regulatory programs have been effective in improving water and air quality and containing urban sprawl, they have not been updated to reflect dramatic economic, technological, cultural, social and ecological changes. New approaches are needed to improve the integration, effectiveness, and accountability of environmental programs, reduce the cost of compliance, and to address issues that are not subject to existing regulations.

Oregon has been a leader in implementing innovative, outcome-base programs that solve problems, save money, and produce a broad suite of social, ecological, and economic benefits. This bill encourages, but does not require, agencies to use innovative approaches in carrying out their responsibilities. It will help developers meet current regulatory requirements more efficiently with better results, save tax and rate payers money by promoting non-structural solutions to manage storm water and flooding. It encourages agencies to provide financial assistance to landowners who manage land and water to achieve specific conservation benefits.

Examples of existing innovative, outcome-based programs include: 1) Clean Water Services compensates landowners for restoring streamside vegetation to cool water for fish, thereby saving millions of dollars for ratepayers and providing other environmental benefits. 2) Private landowners can establish wetland or conservation banks and sell mitigation credits to developers. 3) Transportation agencies can purchase mitigation credits in established banks to save time and money on project implementation.

What the bill does:

- Frames outcome-based approach to environmental policies.
- Adds ecosystem services to principles guiding state land use program.
- Directs Governor's office to synthesize state conservation plans.
- Revises mitigation policies to improve flexibility and overall effectiveness.

Fiscal impact: The bill has a minor fiscal impact. In general it is designed to reallocate existing resources to achieve greater efficiencies in implementing conservation programs.

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