

Washington senator proposes ousting three state agencies from logging board

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OLYMPIA — Three state agencies that report to Gov. Jay Inslee would be removed as voting members of a board that regulates logging on private lands under a bill sponsored by Sen. Shelly Short, a Stevens County Republican.

The departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Ecology appear to be voting as a bloc on the 13-member Forest Practices Board, Short said in an interview.

“The agencies tend to stick together,” she said. “I’m pretty frustrated with what we’re seeing.”

Short said she was motivated to introduce Senate Bill 5673 after the board’s November meeting. The board rejected without discussion a proposal intended to increase timber harvests by small-forest landowners.

The three agencies voted “no,” as did the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Fish and Wildlife, joining representatives of tribes and conservation groups.

Short said she was concerned the three agencies that are part of Inslee’s cabinet had agreed on how to vote before the meeting.

“The only reason I brought the bill up, frankly, was what happened in November,” she said. “I want to nip this in the bud.”

Agriculture’s representative on the board, Kelly McLain, said Tuesday the agencies met before the board meeting to go over the agenda, as they routinely do, but didn’t talk about how to vote.

“That does not happen. It hasn’t happened during the three years I’ve been on the board,” McLain said. “I do feel we can do better at board meetings at being open and communicative.”

The Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on Short’s bill Monday. The governor’s office and Ecology submitted written testimony opposing the legislation.



The legislation would undo a partnership that protects water and supports the timber industry, Ecology director of government relations Adam Eitmann wrote.

The November meeting was a big one for the Washington Farm Forestry Association, which represents small-forest landowners.

The association spent eight years on the proposal to increase logging only to face “unbreakable bloc voting by five state agencies,” small-forest landowner Ken Miller told senators.

Unless state agencies act independently, “it’s kind of pointless for landowners to take anything controversial to the Forest Practices Board,” he said.

“I don’t have the answer to the problem, but I certainly do feel cheated by last fall’s Forest Practice Board’s decisions,” Miller said.

Washington Forest Protection Association governmental relations director Tom Davis said Short’s bill drew attention to a problem, but opposed ousting the agencies from the board.

Better, he said, would be if the agencies represented different perspectives. “We believe it is important to return to the foundation of independence,” he said.

Forest landowners and the timber industry are represented on the Forest Practices Board, forming their own “caucus.” All voted in favor of the forestry association’s proposal.