

ENVIRONS

Governor Gregoire Disseminates Ideas for Reforming How the State Manages Natural Resources and Environmental Protection

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Breaking Developments in Environmental Law

Washington Governor Christine Gregoire has issued a set of ideas to reorganize and reform how the State manages natural resources and protects the environment. The [document](#) describes the suggestions as a "brainstormed list of ideas" to spark further discussion and critical thinking, and not as a blueprint for future reform efforts. However, the Governor's Natural Resources Subcabinet, which consists of 16 agency heads and members of the Governor's staff, put together the list and it provides insight into the state's thinking on natural resources and environmental regulation.

The 127-page document includes 26 ideas for reform and sets out the pros and cons for each. The ideas range from major structural reorganization (*i.e.* changing the number of agencies managing natural resources and environmental protection and shifting management responsibilities between them), to improving or enhancing existing programs. Of the potential reforms, some have the potential to reduce costs for businesses, landowners and developers. These include:

- Consolidating and coordinating some permitting procedures by eliminating duplicative review for certain agency decisions. For example, one idea proposes creation of land use project review teams that would examine development projects and require developers to submit just one application and set of data to the review team (instead of multiple applications to multiple agencies and jurisdictions);
- Standardizing administrative appeal statutes and procedures, in particular for land use decisions under the Shoreline Management Act and the Growth Management Act ("GMA");
- Overhauling the GMA to clarify requirements for cities and counties, reduce appeals, and improve the efficiency of local planning and permitting processes;
- Granting agencies authority to issue permits by rule or to expand programmatic permits, such as expanding the Department of Fish and Wildlife's ability to do programmatic Hydraulic Permit Approvals;
- Coordinating data gathering and management; for example, by creating a centralized, standardized Geographic Information Systems database; and
- Consolidating the management of financial assistance and grants programs and standardizing procedures or eligibility criteria.

The Governor invites public comment through October 28, 2009, and invites other reform ideas in addition to the ones the Natural Resources Subcabinet identified. Comments and ideas can be sent to resource.reform@ofm.wa.wa.gov. To discuss how the Governor's ideas could impact your business, please contact Lane Powell's Environmental Practice Group at the address below.

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