



Bill Analysis

Bill Number: SB 2781

Short Title: Forest, Wetland and Prairie Preservation Grants

Sponsor: Senator Rachel Ventura (D-Joliet) - *Former Will County Board Member*

ISACo Position: Support

Status: Order of Second Reading in the Senate.

Reason for Introduction: SB 2781 is a sponsor initiative intended to help mitigate the issues surrounding climate change. The bill aims to maintain forests, wetlands and prairies by providing local governments with resources to further this goal.

Prior History: Legislation with the same language was filed by Senator Ventura in 2023 (SB 2357). ISACo supported that bill, which was amended several times and advanced to Third Reading in the Senate. Upon adjournment of the spring legislative session, the bill was re-assigned to the Senate Assignments Committee. There were no declared opponents.

Summary of Legislation

Grant Eligibility and Usage

The bill provides that units of local government (including counties) are eligible to apply for the grants. The grants may be used to fund: (1) local projects restoring or expanding forests, wetlands, prairies or other natural landscapes demonstrated to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; (2) education and marketing regarding local projects or steps community members may take to promote the growth of native vegetation that removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; and (3) any other purpose approved by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that advances the State goal that there be no overall net loss of the State's existing forest, prairie, or wetland acres or their functional value due to State-supported activities.

Grant criteria has not been finalized and grants are subject to appropriation. Senator Ventura has filed a companion bill (SB 2782) to appropriate \$5 million to DNR for the grants. ISACo supports this appropriation.

Plan Administration

SB 2781 provides that DNR, pursuant to the comprehensive plan and subject to appropriation, shall establish and administer the plan.

Amendment

Senate Amendment 1 (SA1) was filed on February 29, 2024, to clarify language regarding DNR's administration of the program. The amendment would allow DNR to award grants for the preservation of "other landscapes demonstrated to reduce the impact of climate change" in addition to forests, wetlands and prairies. Additionally, the amendment authorizes DNR to contract with entities to evaluate grant applications for up to five years without an executed extension in length. The introduced bill allowed these contracts to not exceed two years and did not explicitly authorize extensions. The Amendment was adopted by the Senate Environment and Conservation Committee on March 7, 2024.

County Impact

Local governments would become eligible to submit proposals for grant dollars that would aid in funding local projects, education and marketing materials and any other purpose approved DNR that advances the goal of preserving forests, wetlands, prairies acres and other landscapes that reduce the impact of climate change. Participation in the program is voluntary and would not impose any new mandates on counties.