OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6289

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE USE OF DRONES TO ANALYZE, TREAT AND APPLY FERTILIZERS AND PESTICIDES TO CROPS.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) commissioner, by March 1, 2026, to amend existing regulations on pesticide applications from aircraft to allow qualifying applicators to use precision drones to (1) plant seeds and (2) analyze, treat, and apply pesticides and fertilizers to crops. Under the bill, this authority applies only to licensed commercial or private pesticide applicators who are Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-licensed to operate precision drones (see BACKGROUND). (The bill does not define "precision drone.")

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

BACKGROUND

FAA Drone Licenses

Under FAA regulations, commercial drone pilots must have one of two FAA certifications, depending on the drone's weight. To fly a drone weighing less than 55 pounds, prospective pilots must generally (1) obtain a remote pilot certificate and (2) pay a registration fee (14 C.F.R. § 107). To fly a drone weighing 55 pounds or more, prospective pilots must generally (1) acquire an exemption from the transportation secretary and a Certificate of Waiver or Authorization and (2) register their drone with the FAA (49 U.S.C. § 44807; 14 C.F.R. § 91).

Federal Regulation of Agricultural Aircraft Operations

The FAA regulates agricultural aircraft operations, which are generally defined as using aircraft, including drones, to (1) dispense certain substances and fertilizers and (2) engage in dispensing activities that directly affect agriculture, horticulture, or forest preservation. To

operate a drone under these regulations, applicators generally must obtain (1) an agricultural aircraft operator certificate, (2) a valid exemption based on the type of drone used, and (3) a specified airspace authorization or waiver (14 C.F.R. § 137).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 33 Nay 0 (03/14/2025)