

The Botany Bill

Summary of H.R. 1572: Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration, and Promotion Act: A Bill to Promote Botanical Research & Sciences Capacity

Title I – Promoting Botanical Research and Sciences Capacity.

There is a need for more

- research on botanical issues,
- botanists employed within the federal service, and
- incentives for young people to enter careers in botanical sciences.

Federal botanists are especially needed to provide input on land restoration following fires and other events as well as land management practices. The purpose of this Title is to provide support for botanical research and to promote the hiring and placement of botanists in federal agencies.

Section 1 – Research would amend the law governing the Department of Interior to authorize a program of botanical sciences research, including that conducted by Department personnel or extramural research funded through competitive grants and contracts. Funding for the research program would be authorized.

Section 2 – Science Capacity would amend the law governing the Department of Interior to authorize two activities to promote the education and placement of botanists. First, it would authorize the Department to hire new, additional personnel. Second, it would create a student loan repayment program for "botanical science personnel" defined as individuals with post-secondary education in the field of botany. (This provision is based on a similar law known as the National Health Service Corps that provides loan repayment for health professionals who agree to serve in medically under-served areas.)

Title II – Generating Demand for Native Plant Materials – Preference Policy.

This Title helps to promote the use of regionally-adapted native plant materials by federal agencies with relevant jurisdiction. The Departments of Agriculture and Interior are tasked with developing federal policy that provides a preference for the use of locally-adapted native plant materials in their land management activities. Language regarding when non-natives may be used (e.g., emergency conditions, lack of reasonable availability) is derived from existing USDA policy and a definition of native plants is provided.

The Departments of Interior and Agriculture will then disseminate this policy and recommendations to three agencies that have significant land management responsibilities – the Departments of Defense, Transportation, and the Commissioner of Public Buildings.

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Title III – Authorizing Existing Plant Conservation Federal Activities.

This Section creates an explicit authorization for two native-plant related federal activities, and directs a third program to maintain its commitment to plant conservation activities.

Section 1 – Interagency Efforts. This section authorizes funding to support the collaborative work of the Departments of Interior and Agriculture (together with the Smithsonian Institution, U.S. Botanic Garden, and the Federal Highway Administration) on activities related to seed, pollinators and land management. The identified authorities are taken from the National Seed Strategy being implemented by the Department of Interior, the Plant Conservation Alliance (an inter-agency group), and the Pollinator Executive Order.

Section 2 – Plant Conservation Program. This section authorizes the Bureau of Land Management’s existing plant conservation activities, which includes the native plant materials development program.

Section 3 – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Language is included to instruct NFWF to maintain a robust commitment to activities focused on conservation and protection of native plants.