

Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration and Promotion Act

Title I – Promoting Botanical Research and Sciences Capacity.

There is a need for more research on botanical issues, for more botanists in the federal service, and for more incentives for young people to enter careers in botanical sciences. 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. This section would amend the law governing the Department of Interior to authorize a program of botanical sciences research, which could include research conducted by Department personnel or extramural research funded through competitive grants and contracts that would require a 1-to-1 non-federal match. Funding for the research program would be authorized.

Section 2 – Science Capacity. This section 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 and encourages them to utilize the Pathways Program, which was developed during the Obama Administration to streamline the hiring of recent graduates into the federal service. 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.

The continued growth and development of private-sector suppliers of locally-adapted native plant materials can be promoted by stimulating demand for such materials. This Title advances several policies to promote such demand.

Section 1 – Preference Policy. This section contains three subsections that amend the laws governing the Departments of Interior, Agriculture and Defense to declare a federal policy that provides a preference for the use of locally-adapted native plant materials by such agencies in their land management activities. Each agency is directed to implement this policy through appropriate directives and to define situations where the use of non-local, non-natives may be warranted. Language regarding when non-natives may be used is derived from existing USDA policy and a definition of native plants is provided.

Section 2 – Surface Transportation. The federal government, through the Surface Transportation Act, provides funding to the states to undertake a variety of activities related to highway and bridge construction and repair, bike paths and other surface transportation. This includes environmental mitigation and restoration activities. State programs must be reviewed and approved by the federal government. This section would require the states to use native plant materials to the extent practicable in their restoration programs.

Section 3 – Federal Buildings. Various provisions of federal law promote energy efficient (green) buildings, especially with respect to federal buildings. This section would require federal agencies that are developing or redeveloping buildings exceeding 5,000 square feet to maximize the use of native plant materials in such projects. (The provision is modeled on an analogous requirement pertaining to water).

Title III – Authorizing Federal Activities.

Many federal agencies undertake a variety of activities that are allowed by laws that give them general authority in an area of responsibility (for example, “land management”). The importance of a particular activity can be emphasized by creating specific authority for it. This Title authorizes two such activities.

Section 1 – Interagency Efforts. This section authorizes funding to support the collaborative work of the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, 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 draft National Seed Strategy, the Plant Conservation Alliance MOU and the Pollinator Executive Order.

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

Section 3 – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This section includes language instructing NFWF to re-establish a program supporting plant conservation activities.

Section 4 – Cooperative Grants. The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 is amended to establish the authority for a new grant program that would support collaborative grants (between state/local governments and non-profits) to prevent rare plant species from falling into endangered status or to remediate endangered populations. These grants also require a 1-to-1 non-federal match and the program is authorized at a level equivalent to the funding for state wildlife action plans.