

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2967

As Reported By House Committee On:

Natural Resources

Appropriations

Title: An act relating to feeding wildlife during emergency conditions.

Brief Description: Providing for feeding wildlife during emergency conditions.

Sponsors: Representatives Clements, Buck, Regala, Huff and Alexander.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/3/98, 2/5/98 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/7/98 [DPS(NR)].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Buck, Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Regala, Ranking Minority Member; Butler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander and Anderson.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Sump, Vice Chairman; Chandler; Hatfield and Pennington.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: Current law directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife to work closely with landowners suffering game damage problems to control damage without killing the animals when practical. As a matter of practice during winter conditions, the department has established feeding stations for deer and elk in areas of limited winter range and where habitat has been depleted because of forest or wildland fires. For fiscal year 1997, the Legislature provided an appropriation of \$1.4 million from the state general fund for the emergency feeding of deer and elk.

A person who wishes to hunt deer or elk in Washington must buy either a hunting license or a combination hunting and fishing license and then a deer tag or an elk tag. The fees for these licenses and tags are set in statute. For the period 1987 to 1996, annual department sales of combination licenses and hunting licenses have averaged

approximately 97,000 and 170,000 respectively. For the same period, the department sold on average 191,000 deer tags and just under 88,000 elk tags annually. License and tag sales vary from year to year.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature recognizes that wintering wildlife should exist under natural conditions supported by suitable habitat. The Legislature also recognizes, however, that it is in the public interest to feed wildlife on an emergency basis beyond the Department of Fish and Wildlife's regular winter feeding operations. The Legislature further recognizes that hunters and others may be willing to make voluntary contributions to support emergency winter feeding operations.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife must initiate an effort to solicit voluntary contributions to fund emergency winter feeding efforts. The department must provide an opportunity for the purchasers of hunting licenses, combination hunting and fishing licenses, deer tags, and elk tags to contribute voluntarily to this effort. The department may also solicit other donations to support emergency wildlife feeding. Funds received by the department as contributions for emergency winter feeding are to be deposited in the wildlife fund and may only be used for emergency winter feeding operations and associated costs.

The holders of hunting licenses, combination hunting and fishing licenses, deer tags, and elk tags may contribute one additional dollar per license or tag to be dedicated to emergency winter feeding. Beginning July 1, 2000, the department may charge one additional dollar for each deer and elk tag. Funds received through these charges must be used only for emergency winter feeding operations and associated costs.

When the department determines that seasonal conditions will likely require emergency winter feeding operations, the department will provide to the Legislature information on the extent of the emergency, an estimate of the total funds necessary to address the emergency, and information on the total funds raised by the department for emergency winter feeding.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill directs the department to develop and implement an emergency winter feeding funding plan designed to raise at least \$500,000 annually; the substitute bill directs the department to initiate an effort to solicit voluntary contributions for emergency winter feeding efforts. The original bill allows the department to charge an additional dollar for deer and elk tags; the substitute bill allows the department to do so beginning July 1, 2000. The original bill calls for 50 percent of the emergency winter feeding monies to come from new State Lottery scratch games with fish and wildlife themes; the substitute bill does not include the state lottery provisions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 1998.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed except Section 5, which takes effect July 1, 2000.

Testimony For (original bill): The department did use all of the 1997 appropriation for emergency winter feeding. This will help with the well-being of these animals in emergency situations. We need to retain the integrity of the herds, but we need some flexibility too. The consequences of these hard winters will be felt in license and tag sales. During bad winters the department must feed deer and elk. Hunters want those populations maintained to hunt, and non-hunters think it is the humane thing to do, plus they don't want the animals causing damage. There should be a long-range approach for funding this. With the exception of the tags, it's all voluntary. This will still work with the consolidated license package. Deer and elk hunters are willing to invest in this if the money is used for this purpose and is used well. There needs to be a continuity of funding even though the emergency feeding will not occur every year.

Testimony Against (original bill): This would present difficulties for the Lottery Commission. Because of their planning horizon, they could not add another scratch game this biennium without displacing a general fund game. It would be difficult to turn the scratch games on and off. Cattlemen have tried to start a dialogue with the department on this. Other states have tried different approaches. We are disappointed that there are no mandates in the bill for the department to work with their neighbors.

Testified: Representative Jim Clements, prime sponsor; Dave Brittell, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Gerald Rowland, Modern Firearm Hunters of Washington (all in favor); Bob Benson, Washington State Lottery (opposed); and Karla Kay Fullerton, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Natural Resources be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 23 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Wensman, Vice Chairman; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Benson; Carlson; Cody; Cooke; Crouse; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lisk; Mastin; McMorris; Parlette; Regala; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan and Talcott.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 6 members: Representatives H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chopp; Lambert; Poulsen and Tokuda.

Staff: Jason Hall (786-7145).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee on Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee on Natural Resources: No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 1998.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed except Section 5, which takes effect on July 1, 2000.

Testimony For: None.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: None.