

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1204

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Natural Resources & Parks*

Title: An act relating to natural resources conservation areas.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to natural resources conservation areas.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Riley, Beck, Fraser, Wynne, Winsley and Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Natural Resources & Parks, February 1, 1991, DPS.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS**

Staff: Randy Acker (786-7129).

Background:

In 1987 the Legislature created a new land management designation called natural resources conservation area. These are areas that retain their natural character and have plants, animals, geological, archeological, scenic or similar features of critical importance to the people of Washington. They are to be managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Among the various findings that the Legislature made in creating this designation was that these areas provide opportunities for low impact public recreation.

The Legislature identified four areas as natural resources conservation areas including: Mt. Si, Woodard Bay, Dishman Hills, and Cypress Island.

The conservation area account was created in 1987 to receive moneys generated through a real estate excise tax surcharge that was effective through June 30, 1989. Moneys in the account are authorized to be spent only for acquisition of natural resources conservation areas. As of March 1990 there was \$2,832,000 remaining in the account.

The natural resources conservation areas stewardship account was created to ensure proper and continuing management of natural resources conservation areas. There is no statutorily designated source of moneys for the account. The 1990 supplemental operating budget transferred \$2,832,000 from the conservation area account into this account.

The 1989 and 1990 operating budgets provided funds to acquire land and timber from the common school trust to be managed by DNR as natural resources conservation areas or as natural area preserves. DNR also received moneys for acquisition of lands from a 1990 capital budget appropriation for implementation of a proposal by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.

The State Treasurer is authorized to invest fund balances. Twenty percent of the investment income must be deposited in the general fund.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The legislative finding on natural resources conservation area is expanded to include the possibility of a broader range of low impact public uses rather than just low impact recreation. These uses include public recreation as well as other uses that do not adversely affect resource values, are appropriate to maintaining the area in a relatively unmodified natural setting, and do not detract from the long-term ecological processes.

The purpose for which moneys in the natural resources conservation areas stewardship account may be spent is expanded to include natural area preserves and other lands to be managed under chapter 43.98A (Habitat Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Lands).

The balance of the conservation area account is transferred to the natural resources conservation areas stewardship account. Two million dollars of the balance must remain in the account to create an endowment. Only the interest from this endowment may be appropriated to DNR. Investment income from this account is exempt from the general requirement that twenty percent of this income be transferred to the general fund.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: A two million dollar endowment is created in the natural resources conservation areas stewardship account. Only the interest from the endowment may be appropriated to DNR.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The most significant aspect of this bill is the creation of an endowment to pay for maintenance and operating expenses of conservation areas, natural area preserves, and properties purchased from the trusts by the general fund through the Trust Land Transfer Program. The Legislature has recently provided very substantial funding for land acquisition but acquisition alone does not protect the qualities of the lands that warranted their acquisition in the first place. There is a need to provide for public access to these areas and for maintenance of the areas based on a management plan. An endowment will provide for a base level of maintenance for these lands.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Stan Byles, Department of Natural Resources.