

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5332

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks

Title: An act relating to underwater parks.

Brief Description: Permitting the establishment of an underwater parks system.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ecology & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators West, Oke, Nelson, Owen, Pelz, Sutherland, Hargrove, Winsley, von Reichbauer, Erwin and Sheldon).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Natural Resources & Parks, March 30, 1993, DPA.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Pruitt, Chair; R. Johnson, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Stevens, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dunshee; Linville; Schoesler; Sheldon; Thomas; Valle; and Wolfe.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: An underwater park refers to a designated underwater area established to provide recreational diving opportunities. Underwater parks may be designated in naturally occurring areas or in areas where reefs or other features have been created by artificial means.

Summary of Amended Bill: The State Parks and Recreation Commission may establish a system of underwater parks to provide for diverse recreational diving opportunities and to conserve and protect unique marine resources in the state. In establishing and maintaining an underwater park system, the commission may plan, construct, and maintain underwater parks; acquire property and enter into management agreements with other units of state government; construct artificial reefs and other underwater features in underwater parks; accept gifts and donations for the benefit of underwater parks; facilitate private efforts to construct artificial reefs and underwater parks; work with other governments; and contract with other state agencies or local governments for

the management of underwater parks. The State Parks and Recreation Commission is to act as the lead agency for the establishment of underwater parks in state waters.

The commission may charge a fee for recreational uses of an underwater park. The fees and any monetary gifts are to be deposited in the underwater park account, which the bill creates in the state treasury. Funds in the account are to be used for the creation and operation of underwater parks. The funds are subject to appropriation. Prior to implementing a fee program for underwater parks, the commission must submit to the Legislature an estimate of what the fees will be and a plan for collecting the fees.

The commission is not liable for unintentional injuries to users of underwater parks.

The commission is directed to create diverse recreational opportunities in areas throughout Washington State. The commission is to place a high priority on areas with unique or diverse marine life, or with natural or artificial features such as shipwrecks.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The amended bill includes the provision that the commission must submit information to the Legislature prior to implementing a fee program and establishes that the commission is not liable for unintentional injuries to users of water parks.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This will enhance diving opportunities in Washington State. It will be very helpful to have one state agency designated as the lead agency for groups trying to establish underwater parks. Efforts to develop parks in the past have been stymied because no one agency was responsible. Underwater parks have been very popular in other places and help attract tourist dollars. Park status can help protect unique natural areas.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Donald Larson and Dennis Hovorka, Kitsap Diving Association and Washington Scuba Alliance; Robert Burnett, Boeing Employees Scuba Club; Bob Coval, Boeing Employees Scuba Club and Washington Scuba Alliance; Bob Wilder, State Parks and Recreation Commission (all in favor); and Cyreis Schmitt, Department of Fisheries.