

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5332

AS PASSED SENATE, MARCH 9, 1993

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)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5332 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chairman; Barr, Deccio, McCaslin, Moore, Sutherland, and Talmadge.

Staff: Cathy Baker (786-7708)

Hearing Dates: February 12, 1993; February 19, 1993

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

BACKGROUND:

An underwater park refers to either the designation of natural areas or the creation of artificial reefs in order to enhance habitat for marine life and promote recreational diving opportunities. Artificial reefs are often created by sinking old vessels. The vessels are normally cleaned of any contaminants and modified to eliminate safety hazards before they are sunk. Underwater parks and artificial reefs have been established in at least 15 other states, including Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Texas, and California.

SUMMARY:

The State Parks and Recreation Commission may establish a system of underwater parks. In establishing and maintaining an underwater park system, the commission may acquire property and enter into management agreements with other state agencies; construct artificial reefs and other underwater features to enhance marine life and recreational uses; accept gifts and donations for the benefit of underwater parks; enter into interagency agreements to facilitate the receipt of permits from other state agencies and local governments; contract with other jurisdictions for management of underwater park units; and work with the federal government, local governments, and appropriate state agencies to carry out the purposes of the act.

The State Parks and Recreation Commission shall act as the lead agency in the establishment of underwater parks and for environmental reviews of projects necessary to establish underwater parks.

The commission may charge a fee for recreational use of an underwater park to offset administration costs. The fee shall be deposited into an underwater park account. These funds shall be used for operation and creation of underwater parks.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available

TESTIMONY FOR:

Underwater parks are popular tourist attractions and will contribute to the local economy. It is important to have one state agency take the lead in planning and coordinating the establishment of an underwater parks system.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: PRO: Bruce John Higgins, Edmonds Underwater Park; Jim McLennan, South Sound Divers; Donald Larson, Washington Scuba Alliance; Bill Jones, Robert Burnett, Boeing Employee Scuba Club; Gordon Bradley; Louis Mentor, City of Bremerton

HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

Before implementing a fee program for underwater parks, the State Parks and Recreation Commission shall submit to the Legislature an estimate of how much the proposed fees will be and a plan for collecting these fees.

A recreational use immunity clause is added which protects the commission from liability for unintentional injuries to users of underwater parks.