

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5332

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS, FEBRUARY 19, 1993

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

SPONSORS: 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

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 is to establish an underwater parks system. In establishing underwater parks, 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; act as lead agency in environmental reviews of projects necessary to establish an underwater park; enter into interagency agreements to facilitate the receipt of permits from other state agencies and local governments; and contract with other jurisdictions for management of underwater park units.

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 used for operation and creation of underwater parks.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:

The establishment of an underwater parks system by the State Parks and Recreation Commission is discretionary.

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