

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1478

As Reported By House Committee On:

Appropriations

Title: An act relating to feeding wildlife during episodes of severe winter weather.

Brief Description: Feeding wildlife during severe winter weather.

Sponsors: Representatives Clements, Buck, Huff, Lisk, Mulliken, McDonald, Honeyford, Sehlin, McMorris, Sump, Sheldon, Parlette, Skinner, Chandler, Kessler, Hatfield and Grant.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Appropriations: 3/6/97, 3/8/97 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Huff, Chairman; Alexander, Vice Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Wensman, Vice Chairman; H. Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gombosky, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Benson; Carlson; Chopp; Cody; Cooke; Crouse; Grant; Keiser; Kenney; Kessler; Lambert; Linville; Lisk; McMorris; Parlette; Poulsen; Regala; D. Schmidt; Sehlin; Sheahan and Talcott.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Mastin and Tokuda.

Staff: Nancy Stevenson (786-7137).

Background: Under current law, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DF&W) is directed 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 DF&W has established feeding stations for deer and elk in areas of limited winter range and where habitat has been depleted because of forest and wild land fires. If animals are not fed they may pose a risk to crops and private property and become a traffic hazard as they forage for food.

During the winter of 1996-97, an early snowfall and more severe winter conditions than normal have caused the DF&W to feed more animals for a longer period of time. Currently, the DF&W has approximately \$65,000 allotted for emergency winter feeding.

The department issues a number of different licenses. The fees for these various licenses are set in statute.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature recognizes it is in the public interest to feed deer and elk on an emergency basis during episodes of severe winter weather given such animals are at risk of starvation and may be driven to forage on private property, damaging crops and other vegetation.

For the winter of 1997-98, the DF&W is directed to work with hunters and other interested parties to develop and implement an emergency winter feeding funding plan. The plan must raise at least \$1 million dollars. The department may use a number of mechanisms to raise money including increased fees, the sale of surplus property, and donations. Under the plan, fees may not constitute more than 50 percent of total moneys raised. Moneys raised under the plan are to be deposited into the state wildlife fund and may only be used for emergency winter feeding. The plan expires on July 1, 1998, unless approved by the Legislature to continue.

Until December 31, 1998, the department may charge an additional fee for certain licenses above the current fee in order to implement the emergency winter feeding funding plan.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Added by the substitute bill are 1) the requirement to develop and implement an emergency winter feeding funding plan; and 2) the authorization to charge an additional fee for certain licenses. Also, the appropriations section is deleted.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: There are costs to living in harmony with wildlife. Some losses can be managed. The proposed substitute provides a formula for future funding. The cost of the long term solution should not be borne entirely by hunters.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Clements, prime sponsor. (Representative Clements presented testimony via videotape, which was created by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). People who appeared in the tape include the following: Dale Stevens, Douglas County cattle rancher; Dave Billingsley, Grant County cattle rancher; Jerry Monesmith, Douglas County orchardist; George Brady WDFW Enforcement Officer; Scott Fitkin, WDFW Biologist; Patty Tedford, Kittitas County rancher; Frank Thomas WDFW Enforcement Officer; Skip Caton, WDFW Enforcement Officer; and Peggy Bartels, WDFW Biologist.)