

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2797

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to increasing public participation in the establishment of natural area preserves.

Brief Description: Modifying the membership of the natural heritage advisory council.

Sponsors: Representatives Regala, Buck, Ogden, Tokuda, Hatfield and Kessler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 1/28/98, 2/3/98 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/10/98, 96-0.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Buck, Chairman; Sump, Vice Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Regala, Ranking Minority Member; Butler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Anderson; Chandler; Eickmeyer; Hatfield and Pennington.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: When the Legislature established the state's natural area preserve system in 1972, the Legislature created a seven-member Natural Preserves Advisory Committee to assist the Department of Natural Resources with the preserve system. In 1981, the Legislature increased the size of the advisory committee to 15 members and renamed it the Natural Heritage Advisory Council. Of the 15 members, five must be recognized experts in the ecology of natural areas. Four members are public members from various regions of the state; the public members must include or represent at least one private forest landowner and one private agricultural landowner. These nine members are appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands. When the bill passed in 1981, the remaining advisory council members were non-voting members from six state agencies: Game, Ecology, Fisheries, Natural Resources, State Parks, and the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation. The Legislature later amended the state agency portion of the composition of the advisory council, first to reflect the change from

Department of Game to Department of Wildlife, and then to reflect the merger of the Department of Fisheries with the Department of Wildlife. When the Legislature reduced the number of state agencies on the council due to the merger, it did not change the total number of members of the advisory council. However, the Legislature did not provide for how to appoint a fifteenth member.

Before the department seeks to acquire property for either a natural area preserve or a natural resources conservation area, the department first establishes a boundary defining the area in which the department may consider purchases. Current law requires the department to hold a public hearing in the county where the majority of land in a proposed conservation area is located prior to establishing this boundary. There is not a similar local public hearing requirement for establishing boundaries for natural area preserves.

Summary of Bill: The number of public members on the Natural Heritage Advisory Council is increased from four members to five. This yields a 15-member committee composed of five experts, five public members from various regions in the state, and five non-voting members from state agencies.

The Department of Natural Resources must hold a public hearing in the county where the majority of land in a proposed natural area preserve is located prior to establishing the boundary of the preserve.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: People in local communities should be able to voice their support or concerns and ask questions; the local public hearing will allow them to do that.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Debbie Regala, prime sponsor; Scott Merriman, Department of Natural Resources; and Heidi Hall, The Nature Conservancy (all in favor).