

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 3012

As Reported By House Committee On:

Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to achieving greater compliance with laws protecting fish and wildlife.

Brief Description: Achieving greater compliance with laws protecting fish.

Sponsors: Representatives Doumit, Buck, Regala, Schoesler, Linville, McCune, Tokuda, Pennington, Morris, Chandler, Anderson, Butler, Conway, Cole, Costa and Hatfield.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/4/98, 2/5/98 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Buck, Chairman; Sump, Vice Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Regala, Ranking Minority Member; Butler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Anderson; Chandler; Hatfield and Pennington.

Staff: Bill Lynch (786-7092).

Background: Concerns have been expressed by some parties regarding the need for more field officers to enforce fish and wildlife laws.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission does not have express statutory authority to create a reserve officer program to provide better enforcement of fish and wildlife laws.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Department of Fish and Wildlife is authorized to establish a reserve officer program for the purpose of providing better enforcement of fish and wildlife laws. The department determines the scope and line of authority for reserve officers, but it cannot exceed the authority of a commissioned fisheries patrol officer or wildlife agent. A reserve officer must have received law enforcement training and education approved by the Washington State Criminal Justice Commission. The department may require other training as it deems necessary. Reserve officers may not receive an increase in pension benefits or rights for time served as a reserve officer.

The director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife is directed to consult with unions representing employees of the department and with local communities for the purpose of redeploying staff from central office positions to field enforcement positions. Central office positions which become vacant must be reallocated to field enforcement positions to the extent it is feasible. The department is required to prepare a reorganization plan with the assistance of the Fish and Wildlife Commission for the purpose of improving overall department efficiency and providing greater protection to fish and wildlife. The commission must report to the appropriate legislative committees by December 31, 1998, to describe the progress on the plan.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Sections which allowed the hiring of seasonal enforcement officers are deleted. The Department of Fish and Wildlife determines the scope and line of authority of reserve officers, rather than the reserve officers having the same authority as a commissioned fisheries patrol officer or wildlife agent.

Appropriation: The sum of \$1,900,000 from the state general fund is appropriated to the Department of Fish and Wildlife to hire or retain fisheries patrol officers and wildlife agents. Priority is to be given to areas where aquatic species have been listed or are proposed to be listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Since the merger of two agencies into the Department of Fish and Wildlife, there are 16 less enforcement officers enforcing fish and wildlife laws. The loss of funds from the Bonneville Power Administration will result in the loss of 12 more officers. Much of the current officers' time is spent responding to health and safety issues pertaining to cougars and bears. We need to enforce the laws to safeguard our resources. A stronger presence in the field results in less violations. Reserve officer programs for local governments work well. A reserve officer program is already being operated by the department, but it doesn't exist in statute. There are increasing problems being experienced in marine waters. There are many incidents which aren't being dealt with because of the lack of officers. There is an urgent need to address enforcement because of listings under the Endangered Species Act.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Rep. Mark Doumit, prime sponsor; Ron Swatfigure, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Gerald Rowlands, Modern Firearm Hunters of WA.; Steve Robinson, NW Indian Fisheries Commission; Bill Hiblar, Trout Unlimited; Ed Owens, Commercial Fishing; and Jim Wilcox, Trout Unlimited.