

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4005

As Passed Legislature

Brief Description: Returning land within the Hanford control zone to agricultural and wildlife uses.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Agriculture & Ecology (originally sponsored by Representatives Mulliken, Chandler, Hankins, Sheahan, Skinner, Lisk, Delvin, Clements, Honeyford, Schoesler, Mastin, Grant, Mielke and McMorris).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 2/5/97, 2/27/97 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/19/97, 60-38.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Chandler, Chairman; Parlette, Vice Chairman; Schoesler, Vice Chairman; Delvin; Koster; Mastin and Sump.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Linville, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cooper and Regala.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: Land acquisition by the federal government for the Hanford Reservation was authorized in February 1943. The Wahluke Slope Control Zone, an area north of the Columbia River, was established on November 15, 1943.

The federal Department of Energy has deactivated its reactors at the Hanford Reservation. It is now in the process of decontaminating them and related areas. As the department goes through this process, it will make decisions on how to remove portions of its lands from Department of Energy control. The Wahluke Slope Control Zone is currently managed as a wildlife area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages one portion of these lands, and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife manages the remainder of these lands.

Summary of Memorial: The President of the United States, Congress, and the director of the Department of Energy are requested to reduce, except for needed buffer zones, the present boundaries of the Department of Energy's Hanford Control Zone on the Wahluke Slope to the area south of the Columbia River. They are asked to transfer in total the Wahluke Slope, presently under the custody and control of the Department of Energy, to the counties of Grant, Franklin, and Adams for the purpose of returning the land to its former agricultural use, as well as for wildlife and recreational use in areas along the Hanford Reach.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: (1) People were displaced from the Wahluke Slope area of the Hanford Reservation when the Hanford Project was developed during World War II. This proposal will return lands suitable for irrigation back to local use and the local tax rolls. It will also provide lands for wildlife. (2) When the federal government took these lands, it paid for only 10 years of use. Prior to that, most of the lands were farmed or ranched. (3) The lands taken from the Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project were to have been returned to the bureau's project when Hanford no longer needed them. (4) These lands are currently being protected by local people and local government. When polled, most of the local people favored returning the lands to local control. (5) Under the Wahluke 2000 plan, approximately one-third of the lands would be used for irrigation, one-third for wildlife, and one-third for protecting the White Bluffs area. (6) The irrigable lands have a 205-day growing season and are the last acreage readily irrigable by the Columbia Basin Project, unless the second half of the project is built.

Testimony Against: (1) The Hanford Reach and the surrounding lands are an extraordinary example of what this part of the state was like before agricultural development; all of the similar areas have been lost to development. Twenty-one species of insects and plants previously not classified by science have been found in this area. (2) Studies by the Bureau of Reclamation indicate that any agricultural activity conducted in some parts of the area would threaten the Hanford Reach and that half of the area identified would be irrigated under the Wahluke 2000 plan. Irrigating other lands should be a higher priority. (3) A poll indicates that most of the people oppose the return of these lands to private ownership. (4) The local plan does not take into account a clay layer near the White Bluffs that moves water laterally and causes sloughing at the bluffs, nor does it identify where the water to irrigate the land would come from. (5) The timing for this proposal is bad; salmon spawning grounds should be protected. (6) The area contains numerous archeological sites and root gathering and ceremonial sites on land ceded by the Yakima Nation. Some of the lands in the area are still contaminated.

Testified: Representative Mulliken, prime sponsor; and LeRoy Allison, Grant County (in favor). Maggie Coon, Nature Conservancy; Ron Shultz, National Audubon Society; Greg Stewart, Rivers Council of Washington; and Dawn Vyvyan, Yakima Nation (opposed).