

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1478

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, April 3, 1997
Ways & Means, April 14, 1997

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

Brief Description: Feeding wildlife during severe winters.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Clements, Buck, Huff, Lisk, Mulliken, McDonald, Honeyford, Sehlin, McMorris, Sump, Sheldon, Parlette, Skinner, Chandler, Kessler, Hatfield and Grant).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 4/3/97 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 4/14/97 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Oke, Chair; Rossi, Vice Chair; Hargrove, Jacobsen, Morton, Prentice, Snyder, Spanel, Stevens and Swecker.

Staff: Ross Antipa (786-7413)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators West, Chair; Deccio, Vice Chair; Strannigan, Vice Chair; Bauer, Fraser, Hochstatter, Kohl, Long, McDonald, Roach, Rossi, Snyder, Spanel, Winsley and Zarelli.

Staff: Cathy Baker (786-7708)

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, 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 DF&W to feed more animals for a longer period of time. Currently, 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 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, 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. 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 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 hunting and fishing licenses and deer and elk transport tags above the current fee in order to implement the emergency winter feeding funding plan.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For (Natural Resources & Parks): Deer and elk mortality was severe this winter. Supplemental feeding is necessary to prevent excessive winter mortality in big game populations. The department needs to develop a long range plan to fund big game winter feeding.

Testimony Against (Natural Resources & Parks): None.

Testified (Natural Resources & Parks): Rep. Jim Clements (pro); Gerald Rowlands, President, Modern Firearm Hunters of Washington (pro); Gene Tillett, WDFW (pro).

Testimony For (Ways & Means): The bill provides several funding mechanisms to help address anticipated winter feeding costs next winter. The funding mechanisms are realistic and can be implemented.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Testified (Ways & Means): Rep. Jim Clements, prime sponsor; Gene Tillett, WDFW (pro).