

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1485

As Passed House:

March 9, 1999

Title: An act relating to the Whidbey Island game farm.

Brief Description: Prohibiting the sale of the Whidbey Island game farm.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Capital Budget (Originally sponsored by Representatives Barlean and Anderson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Capital Budget: 2/8/99, 2/24/99 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/9/99, 97-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife to sell the Whidbey Island game farm located in Island County.
- Directs the State Treasurer to lend \$694,000 to the Department of Fish and Wildlife if the Whidbey Island game farm is not sold by June 30, 1999.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CAPITAL BUDGET

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Mitchell, Republican Co-Chair; Murray, Democratic Co-Chair; Edmonds, Democratic Vice Chair; Esser, Republican Vice Chair; Alexander; Anderson; Barlean; Bush; Dunshee; Lantz; Miloscia; O'Brien; Ogden and Schoesler.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hankins and Koster.

Staff: Susan Howson (786-7142)

Background:

The Whidbey Island game farm encompasses approximately 170 acres. About 120 acres of the game farm is located inside the Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve established by Congress in 1978. The Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve was established to commemorate the first thorough exploration of the Puget Sound area by Captain George Vancouver in 1792; settlement by Colonel Isaac Neff Ebey, who led the first permanent white settlers to Whidbey Island; the early active years of the Federal Donation Land Law of 1850-55; and the growth since 1883 of the historic town of Coupeville.

The former Department of Game, using revenue from the sale of hunting licenses, purchased the Whidbey Island game farm in 1945 from a private party for the purpose of developing and operating a game farm. The department raised pheasants on the property for recreation there and elsewhere in the state. Over the past three biennia, the Legislature has appropriated \$2,175,000 in the Capital Budget to consolidate the department's game farms operations into Lewis County and since then, the Whidbey Island property has been used for a game bird holding and distribution center.

To address a shortfall in receipts to the Wildlife Account, the portions not proposed for sale are 30 acres for the game farm operations and 10 acres of native prairie habitat and its buffer. Department of Fish and Wildlife has a proposal to sell 130 acres of the former game farm that are surplus to the department's needs.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife shall endeavor to sell the Whidbey Island game farm located in Island County. If the sale takes place within one year after the effective date, the department may only sell the game farm to a nonprofit corporation, consortium of nonprofit corporations, or a municipal corporation for purposes of undeveloped open space and historical preservation. If the sale takes place more than one year after the effective date, this condition does not apply. In addition, the State Treasurer is directed to loan \$694,000 from the state general fund to the Department of Fish and Wildlife if the property is not sold by June 30, 1999, to address a shortfall in receipts to the Wildlife Account. The loan shall be repaid by June 30, 2001, or when the department sells the property, whichever occurs earlier.

Appropriation: None.**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: (Substitute bill) The Whidbey Island game farm supports a native prairie which represents the best remaining example of a glacial out-wash prairie in the northern Puget Sound lowlands. These prairies are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the state of Washington. Because of its location, there is a lot of restoration potential to the site. There are only four national reserves in the United States out of 375 national park units. Ebey's Landing was instrumental in the creation of the other three national reserves. This legislation buys the time needed to coordinate the efforts of the interested parties to preserve the historical nature of the property.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Rob Harbour, Ebey's Landing Historical Reserve; Steve Erickson, Whidbey Environmental Action Group; Len Barson, Nature Conservancy; Rick Wagner, National Park Service; Margie Parker, local resident; Joan Roberts, Whidbey Audobon; Marianne Edain, local community; and Robinson Lappin, Trust Board of Ebey's Landing.