

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

Brief Description: Proposing a study of aspects of the natural area preserves program under chapter 79.70 RCW.

HOUSE BILL 1003

Committee: Natural Resources **Natural Area Preserves**

Sponsor(s): Representatives Hatfield, Sump, Doumit, Pennington, Dunn and Kessler

Background: In 1972, the Legislature chose to create a state system of natural area preserves. Natural area preserves are areas of land or water which have retained their natural character, although not necessarily completely natural or undisturbed, or which are important in preserving rare or vanishing flora, fauna, geological, natural historical or similar features of scientific or educational value. The Legislature assigned management responsibility for state-owned natural area preserves to the Department of Natural Resources. The department currently manages 46 such preserves encompassing over 25,000 acres.

In 1987, the Legislature chose to create a system of natural resources conservation areas. These are state properties managed for "conservation purposes," which include maintaining, enhancing, and restoring ecological systems, maintaining exceptional scenic landscapes, maintaining habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, enhancing sites for primitive recreational purposes, and outdoor environmental education. The Legislature also assigned management responsibility for these areas to the Department of Natural Resources. The department currently manages 24 natural resources conservation areas encompassing approximately 51,000 acres.

Of the 46 natural area preserves, six are in Grays Harbor County: Carlisle Bog (310 acres), Chehalis River Surge Plain (2,307 acres), Goose Island (12 acres), North Bay (659 acres), Sand Island (8 acres), and Whitcomb Flats (5 acres). Four are in Pacific County: Bone River (2,444 acres), Gunpowder Island (152 acres), Niawiakum River (797 acres) and Willapa Divide (275 acres). The department reports that there are interim plans for Carlisle Bog, North Bay, and Chehalis River Surge Plan and no plans for the remaining three natural area preserves in Grays Harbor County. In Pacific County, Gunpowder Island is the only natural area preserve that does not have an interim plan.

Summary: The Department of Natural Resources is precluded from adopting a new management plan for any natural area preserve in Grays Harbor and Pacific counties before January 10, 2000.

The House Natural Resources Committee must study the following aspects of

the natural area preserves program: (1) the potential impact, if any, of defining preserve boundaries which encompass land that has not yet been purchased for the program; (2) the correlation between the goals and purposes of the preserve program and the conservation areas program, and the potential use of both programs in selected areas; (3) the current procedures that ensure the adequacy of local public input concerning preserve boundaries and management; and (4) the criteria and scientific methods used to ensure that preserves fulfill the purposes of the program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: None requested.

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

Rulemaking Authority: None.