

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6575

As Reported by House Committee On:

Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to natural area preserves.

Brief Description: Concerning the designation of certain lands as natural area preserves or natural resource conservation areas.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines (originally sponsored by Senator Hargrove).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/20/02, 2/26/02 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- Directs the Department of Natural Resources to develop a management plan for each designated natural area preserve.
- Requires the inclusion of natural resources conservation areas within the natural heritage plan.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Doumit, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Sump, Ranking Minority Member; Eickmeyer, Ericksen, Jackley, McDermott, Orcutt, Pearson and Upthegrove.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Buck.

Staff: Bill Lynch (786-7092).

Background:

The state of Washington has two different natural resource conservation programs. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is authorized to acquire property for management as natural resources conservation areas and as natural area preserves.

Natural resources conservation areas are established for their outstanding scenic and ecological values, and allow for low-impact public use. The DNR is required to develop a management plan for each natural resources conservation area that identifies the significant resources to be conserved and the areas with potential for low-impact public and environmental educational uses. The DNR must make the plans available for public review and comment, including comment from state, tribal, and local agencies, before being adopted by the Commissioner of Public Lands.

Natural area preserves have more limited public access and are established in order to preserve the best remaining examples of Washington's native ecosystems. The DNR is responsible for maintaining a state register of natural area preserves, maintaining a natural heritage program to assist in nominating and selecting areas for this designation, and for preparing a natural heritage plan to create and manage the system of natural areas. The Natural Heritage Advisory Council assists the DNR by reviewing and approving the natural heritage plan, and reviewing and approving nominations for registration of lands as natural area preserves.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The DNR is directed to develop a management plan for each designated natural area preserve. The plan must identify the significant resources to be conserved and the areas with potential for low-impact public and environmental educational uses. The DNR must make the plans available for public review and comment, including comment from state, tribal, and local agencies, before being adopted by the Commissioner of Public Lands. Where it is appropriate, a buffer zone may be established around an environmentally sensitive area with an increased low level of public access.

The natural heritage plan must include natural resources conservation areas in addition to natural area preserves. The Natural Heritage Advisory Council is required to recommend whether new areas should be established as natural area preserves, natural resources conservation areas, a combination of both, or some other protected status. The council is also directed to comment on management plans proposed for individual natural area preserves.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

A technical amendment is made to correct the references to the name of the natural resources conservation areas.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill is a compromise that is a good accommodation of the different interests. Lands that are valuable to the community can now be accessed in a manner that doesn't damage them. This measure provides much needed flexibility in the management of the natural area preserves. Incorporating natural resources conservation areas into the natural heritage program is good management. This combines the best aspects of both programs. The case-by-case review is good. Private landowner rights are not affected.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Brian Blake, citizen; Len Barson, Nature Conservancy; Jay Sterling, citizen; and Bonnie Bunning, Department of Natural Resources.