

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1655

As Reported by House Committee On:

Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the creation of an advisory committee to the fish and wildlife commission composed of disabled individuals.

Brief Description: Appointing a fish and wildlife advisory committee composed of disabled persons.

Sponsors: Representatives Sump, Doumit, Pearson, Rockefeller and Clements.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/7/01, 2/14/01 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes a four-year pilot program creating an advisory committee for the Fish and Wildlife Commission composed of disabled hunters and fishers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Doumit, Democratic Co-Chair; Sump, Republican Co-Chair; Pearson, Republican Vice Chair; Rockefeller, Democratic Vice Chair; Buck, G. Chandler, Eickmeyer, Jackley, Murray and Pennington.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (commission) serves as the supervising authority for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (department). The commission received its authority from passage of Referendum 45 by both the Legislature and the public in 1995. The commission has a variety of duties, including: 1) the establishment of hunting and fishing seasons, 2) prescribing the time, place, and manner of game fish and wildlife harvest, 3) establishment of provisions regulating food fish and shellfish, 4) adoption of rules to implement the state's fish and wildlife laws, 5) and final authority over the

department's budget proposals and any tribal, interstate, or international fish and wildlife agreements.

The commission provides some opportunities for persons with disabilities. These programs include the issuance of a disabled hunter permit and the establishment of Persons with Disabilities Hunts.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The commission must appoint seven persons with a disability, one from each of the department's administrative region, and one from anywhere in the state, to an advisory committee. The advisory committee generally represents the interests of disabled hunters and fishers on matters such as special hunts, modified sporting equipment, access to public land, and hunting and fishing opportunities.

The advisory committee meets twice a year at minimum and is composed of volunteers serving four-year terms. All official advisory committee meetings are staffed by two persons provided by the department. The members of the advisory committee are reimbursed for travel expenses and provided with a per diem.

The advisory committee is a pilot program expiring on July 1, 2005. By December 1, 2004, the commission will present a report to the Legislature detailing the effectiveness of the advisory committee, including information on participation levels, general interest, quality of advice, and recommendations for the advisory committee's continuance or modification.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Original bill required the advisory committee to be composed of five members, with two from western Washington, two from eastern Washington, and one serving at large. Also, the original bill did not include severe respiratory or cardiac disease in the definition of a disability.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The disabled hunters and fishers advisory committee gives standing to the disabled community and allows them to give insight to the commission as to what

little things can be done to enable handicapped individuals to enjoy outdoor sport. Issues effecting only the disabled are often ignored, or never raised, by the commission. Many disabled sportsmen and women feel that the commission are deaf to their plight. Many handicapped individuals can only hunt from vehicles, yet often the department's regulations make this impossible or impractical. The result of regulations that are promulgated without the concerns of the disabled addressed is that the disabled are treated differently then the non-disabled. Current department rules make handicapped hunts difficult to obtain, require a showing of crop damage, and is restricted to hunting deer and elk that do not have antlers.

(With concerns) The disabled community is very diverse and faces unique challenges; therefore, the number of members on the advisory committee should be large enough to incorporate as many aspects of the disabled community as possible. The department has recently underwent a federal audit under the Americans With Disabilities Act and received decent marks. Steps are being taken by the department to accommodate handicapped individuals. Codifying the definition of disabled– may lead to an overly restrictive application.

Testimony Against: None

Testified: Representative Sump, prime sponsor; Mary Kirry; B.J. Thorneby, Hunters Heritage Council; Albert Vincent; Richard Reimann; Harold Saunders, Disabled Sportsmen Association of Washington; Tom Baskin, Disabled Sportsmen Association of Washington; Garry Rosman; and Russ Cahill, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.