

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6474

As Passed Senate, February 15, 2002

Title: An act relating to purchase of land by state agencies.

Brief Description: Reviewing certain state agency land purchases.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines (originally sponsored by Senators Morton, Hargrove, Hewitt, Honeyford, T. Sheldon, Hochstatter, Benton, Stevens, McCaslin, Long, Hale and Sheahan).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines: 1/31/02, 2/6/02 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 2/15/02, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, PARKS & SHORELINES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6474 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Poulsen, Vice Chair; Hargrove, McDonald, Morton, Oke, Snyder, Spanel and Stevens.

Staff: Kari Guy (786-7437)

Background: In 1999 the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation completed an inventory of publicly-owned lands in each county of the state. According to that report, there are six counties where federal, state, local and tribal land ownership exceeds 70 percent of the total area of the county. These counties are Chelan, Ferry, Jefferson, Okanogan, Skamania, and Yakima.

The State Noxious Weed Control Board prepares an annual list of noxious weeds. State agencies are required to control noxious weeds on lands they own or lease.

Concerns have been raised that state land purchases are harming rural economies, and state agencies are not maintaining the lands purchased.

Summary of Bill: The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee must review state agency land purchases for wildlife habitat conservation in the six counties of the state with the highest proportion of public ownership. The study must include the impact of state ownership on local tax revenues, adjacent land values, and the local economy. The study must also include an assessment of the maintenance and management of lands purchased. The report must be submitted to the natural resources committees of the Senate and House by December 1, 2003.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 2002.

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

Testimony For: Loss of farm revenue has a multiplier effect in our county. It is not only the loss of tax revenue, but the loss of community jobs and money. The Department of Fish and Wildlife is a bad neighbor; it does not control weeds on its lands and does not maintain ditches. WDFW pays more than the property is worth and is falsely inflating surrounding property values. In lieu taxes WDFW pays are minimal and are not paid on parcels of less than 100 acres. In addition, many county costs are disproportionately spent on non-taxable public lands; for example 99 percent of search and rescue costs are spent on government lands.

Testimony Against: WDFW acquisitions protect valuable habitat as directed by the Legislature. This bill would jeopardize approximately \$9 million in approved habitat acquisition grants in Chelan and Okanogan counties. The state uses outside appraisal companies and is successful on only 60 percent of negotiations. Some sellers choose to sell to WDFW to protect their land.

Testified: Steve Pozzanghera, Mark Quinn, WDFW (con); Craig Vejraska, Okanogan County Commissioner (pro); Buell Hawkins, Ron Walter, Chelan County Commissioner (pro); Mike Ryherd, WA Wildlife and Recreation Assn. (con).