

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1512

As Reported by House Committee On:

Fisheries, Ecology & Parks

Title: An act relating to controlling game damage to crops.

Brief Description: Allowing special hunts to reduce crop damage caused by wildlife.

Sponsors: Representatives Cox, Fromhold, Sump, Schoesler, Hatfield, Ahern, Clements and Armstrong.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Fisheries, Ecology & Parks: 2/14/03, 2/25/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Fish and Wildlife Commission to issue one or two antlerless permits per hunter for special hunts to be conducted in areas where the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has confirmed six incidents of agricultural and horticultural crop damage caused by deer or elk.
- Requires the Department to utilize a list of available local hunters when selecting participants for a special hunt.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Cooper, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Sump, Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buck, Hatfield, O'Brien, Pearson and Upthegrove.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is instructed to work closely with landowners to find non-lethal solutions to problem wildlife. However, if such efforts are not practical, the Department is authorized to increase the harvest of damage-causing animals during the hunting season. The Department also has the discretionary authority

to conduct special hunts in problem areas as a result of recurring complaints regarding property being damaged by wildlife.

In addition to special hunts, the owner or tenant of real property being damaged by wildlife is authorized to trap or kill problem wildlife that is causing damage to crops. However, that permission does not extend to endangered or threatened species, or to deer and elk. Problem deer and elk may only be killed with a take permit issued by the Department, unless the situation is an emergency and the Department has given the landowner verbal permission to harvest the deer or elk. On cattle ranching land, the owner may only declare an emergency if the Department does not respond within 48 hours of notification. Even if an emergency situation exists, the owners of cattle ranching land may not kill the problem wildlife if they did not make the land available for public hunting during the previous hunting season.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is authorized to conduct special hunts in areas where game populations exist at a level that damages property or over-utilizes the habitat. The Commission's authority includes the ability to identify the number and sex of animals that are allowed to be taken. The Director of the Department is required to determine a selection system for the hunters allowed to participate in a special season that ensures a random selection.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Special Hunts

The Commission is directed to authorize the issuance of between one and two antlerless permits per hunter for special hunts to be conducted in areas where the Department, or its designee, has confirmed six incidents of agricultural and horticultural crop damage caused by deer or elk. Complaints must be received from the owner or tenant of real property, or from several owners or tenants in the same locale.

Hunter Selection

The Department is required to maintain a list of persons holding valid wildlife hunting licenses, arranged by county of residence, who are available to hunt deer or elk causing damage to crops. The Department must update the list at least annually. When contacting people to help control game damage to crops, the Department must use the list and must make all reasonable efforts to contact a resident of the county where the activity will occur before contacting a resident of a different county. The names on the list must be randomized in order to provide a fair distribution of the hunting opportunities. Hunters participating in these hunts must report their kills to the Department, and the information provided must be included in a summary of wildlife harvested that is available to the public.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill allows special hunts for antlerless deer and elk, provides the Commission with discretion to issue one or two special permits in damage areas, allows designees of the Department to confirm animal damage complaints, requires the Department to update their list of special hunt participants annually, requires the Department to list all hunters on their list of special hunt participants, and makes technical changes.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) Meetings in rural areas about wildlife crop damage consistently bring out many concerned people. Some express concern about inaction by the Department, but often the Department is unable to recruit enough local hunters in order to harvest enough of the damage causing deer and elk.

(With concerns) The Department currently has numerous tools to deal with wildlife crop damage. Hundreds of landowner option licenses are issued each year, in addition to hot spot hunts and other hunting options. This bill would require that a hunt occur, even if that was not the best management practice for the problem.

Setting a threshold of six complaints to trigger a hunt may not accurately address the problem. There should be a quantitative trigger that describes herd size or the value of crops being destroyed.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Don Cox, prime sponsor.

(With concerns) Steve Pozzanghera and Jerry Nelson, Department of Fish and Wildlife.