

FINAL BILL REPORT

ESHB 2650

C 180 L 04

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Recognizing important bird areas.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Linville, Flannigan, Cooper, Priest, Quall, Jarrett, Kessler, Tom, Rockefeller, Dunshee, Grant, Romero, Moeller, McDermott, O'Brien, Chase, Uptegrove, Hunt, G. Simpson, Kenney, Wallace, Wood and Kagi).

House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources
Senate Committee on Parks, Fish & Wildlife

Background:

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is authorized to maintain a natural heritage program. This program is designed to provide assistance to the DNR in the selection and nomination of areas in the state containing natural heritage resources. Natural heritage resources are unique types of plant communities, animal species, and geologic or aquatic areas.

The natural heritage program is required to maintain a database that contains the location of natural heritage resources in the state. The information in the database is available to public and private entities to aid in environmental assessments and land management decisions. Generally, information in the database that relates to wildlife habitat is developed jointly with the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The natural heritage program is directed by the natural heritage plan. This plan is required to provide details on which natural heritage resources are to be considered and provide criteria for the selection of natural areas. Natural areas, also known as natural area preserves, are lands which have retained much of their natural character or are important in preserving natural heritage resources. Natural areas may be purchased, leased, set aside, or exchanged by the DNR. Natural areas in the state must be listed on the Washington Register of Natural Area Preserves. To be included on the register, the owner of the natural area must have voluntarily agreed to participate.

Summary:

The DNR is provided discretionary authority to recognize important bird areas within its natural heritage program, using information collected by a qualifying nonprofit organization. "Qualifying nonprofit organization" is defined as a national nonprofit organization, or a branch of the organization, that conserves and restores natural ecosystems. "Important bird areas" is defined as areas identified by the DNR and a qualifying nonprofit organization as being

necessary to conserve populations of wild water fowl, upland game birds, songbirds, or other birds or their habitat.

Information relied on by the DNR should be based on internationally agreed-upon scientific criteria and protocols developed by a qualifying nonprofit organization. Once recognized, important bird areas must be included in the natural heritage program's data bank. Any qualifying nonprofit organization that teams with the DNR is encouraged to work with interested parties to maintain or enhance important bird areas.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 95 0
Senate 48 0 (Senate amended)
House 93 0 (House concurred)

Effective: June 10, 2004