

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2650

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Parks, Fish & Wildlife, February 24, 2004

Title: An act relating to important bird areas.

Brief Description: Recognizing important bird areas.

Sponsors: 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, Upthegrove, Hunt, G. Simpson, Kenney, Wallace, Wood and Kagi).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Parks, Fish & Wildlife: 2/24/04 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON PARKS, FISH & WILDLIFE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Oke, Chair; Sheahan, Vice Chair; Doumit, Jacobsen, Morton, Spanel and Swecker.

Staff: Kari Guy (786-7437)

Background: The Natural Heritage Program at the Department of Natural Resources is charged with maintaining a classification of natural heritage resources, an inventory of their locations, and a data bank for the information. Natural heritage resources may include plant communities, aquatic types, unique geologic types, and critical habitat areas. Information from the data bank is made available to the public and agencies for environmental assessment or land management purposes.

The National Audubon Society, and its local chapter Audubon Washington, are working to identify "important bird areas" in Washington. Sites are selected based on the presence or abundance of birds, and the condition and quality of habitat. Audubon Washington intends to use the important bird area inventory to provide the public, landowners, and agency land managers with reliable information on where birds are, to support sound land management decisions and enhance nature-based tourism.

Summary of Amended Bill: The Natural Heritage Program at the Department of Natural Resources may use the information collected by qualifying nonprofit organizations to recognize important bird areas. Qualifying nonprofit organizations are nonprofit organizations that conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitat. Before an important bird area may be recognized, the Department of Natural Resources must publish notice of the proposal and hold a public hearing in the county where the proposed important bird area is located.

When the Natural Heritage Program recognizes an important bird area, that information must be included in the programs's data bank. The qualifying nonprofit organization that proposed the site for inclusion should be available to work with interested landowners, businesses, and government agencies to identify ways to enhance important bird areas.

Recognition of private property as an important bird area does not confer any rights of access or trespass onto the important bird area without consent of the property owner. Recognition of an important bird area does not require or create critical area designation under the Growth Management Act.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The amendment specifies that recognition of an important bird area does not require or create critical area designation under the Growth Management Act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This will allow credible data gathered by volunteer groups to be used in the Natural Heritage Program, as long as the data is carefully screened. The bill acknowledges the value of hunting, fishing, and bird watching to local communities.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Rep. Linville, prime sponsor; Rocky Beach, WDFW; Heath Packard, Audubon.