

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6342

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Parks, Fish & Wildlife, February 2, 2004

**Title:** An act relating to important bird areas.

**Brief Description:** Recognizing important bird areas.

**Sponsors:** Senators Oke, Jacobsen, Parlette, Swecker, Finkbeiner, Winsley, Spanel, Berkey, Esser, Regala, Kline, T. Sheldon, Fraser, Doumit, Rasmussen, Haugen and Eide.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Parks, Fish & Wildlife: 1/26/04, 2/2/04 [DPS].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON PARKS, FISH & WILDLIFE

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6342 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Oke, Chair; Doumit, Jacobsen, 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 Substitute 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. When the project recognizes an important bird area, that information must be included in the programs's description.

Qualifying nonprofits are nonprofits that conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitat.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The use of important bird area information by the Natural Heritage Program is made discretionary. Specific references to Audubon

Washington is eliminated outside of the intent section; any qualifying nonprofit may propose important bird areas.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Testimony For:** Audubon Washington is using important bird area information to promote nature tourism in many local communities. This will dovetail with work by WDFW and CTED to create a nature tourism strategy. Important bird areas have been designated in 40 states, and have a very positive impact on the local economy. There is no regulatory mechanism inherent in the Natural Heritage Registry.

**Testimony Against:** The state should not rely on information provided by a national advocacy organization, that may attempt to remove lands from productive agriculture. Tourism benefits of wildlife areas are already there, there is no need for the added designation.

**Testified:** PRO: Nina Carter, Charles F. Heebner, Audubon; John M. Finkbeiner, Michael E. Anderson, Audubon; Jan McMillan, Grays Harbor Audubon; Steve Pozzanghera, WDFW; Dee Arntz, Audubon; Sue Damer, Black Hills Audubon; CON: Dan Wood, Farm Bureau.