

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5118

As of February 2, 2005

Title: An act relating to expanding the criteria for habitat conservation programs.

Brief Description: Concerning habitat conservation programs.

Sponsors: Senators Parlette, Doumit, Oke and Esser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/2/05.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) provides funds for the acquisition and development of outdoor recreation and habitat conservation areas. Counties, cities, ports, park and recreation districts, school districts, state agencies, and tribes are eligible to apply. Grant applications are evaluated annually and the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation submits a list of prioritized projects to the Governor and Legislature for approval.

Half of the funds appropriated in a biennium for the WWRP are for habitat conservation, and are allocated according to a statutory formula for critical habitat, natural areas, and urban wildlife habitat. The other half of the funds are appropriated for outdoor recreation, allocated by formulas established in statute for state parks, local parks, trails and water access sites. A portion of each account is left unallocated.

Summary of Bill: A new category for restoration and enhancement projects by state agencies reduces the unallocated portion of the habitat conservation account. Within the outdoor recreation account, the statutory allocations for state parks, local parks, and trails are increased, with a smaller percentage left unallocated. Criteria for grant categories are revised to include such considerations as consistency with land use, shoreline, watershed, and recovery plans and the statewide significance of critical habitat projects.

The Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation may retain up to three percent of WWRP funds for administration. The Committee may accept private donations to the WWRP accounts. Project lists are prepared and submitted to the Governor in even numbered years.

Lands acquired by the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Fish and Wildlife using funds from the habitat conservation account are subject to payments in lieu of property taxes and for weed control.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: July 1, 2005.

Testimony For: Payments in lieu of property taxes would protect counties from losing part of their tax base when lands are acquired through the WWRP. The requirement for WWRP grant applicants to coordinate with local governments in counties where governments are the primary landowners would provide local governments with a voice on projects conducted in their jurisdiction. Expanding grant criteria to include factors relating to local planning would assist local governments implement these plans. As Washington State grows, the WWRP provides a valuable opportunity to preserve habitat and the state's high quality of life.

Testimony Against: The effective date of the bill would not allow the WWRP to adopt to the new criteria mandated in the bill. The bill does not include direct means for protecting farmlands and riparian areas.

Who Testified: PRO: Bonnie Bunning, Department of Natural Resources; Gary O'Neil, Department of Revenue; Mark Quinn, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Fred Romero, Parks and Recreation Commission; John Stuhlmiller, Farm Bureau.

CON: Mike Ryherd, Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.