

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5219

As Passed House:

April 9, 2007

Title: An act relating to the Northwest weather and avalanche center.

Brief Description: Regarding the Northwest weather and avalanche center.

Sponsors: By Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senator Jacobsen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 3/26/07, 3/29/07 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/9/07, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the State Parks and Recreation Commission to invite certain federal, state, local, and private entities to cooperatively develop an intergovernmental plan and recommendations to ensure the Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center receives adequate resources to continue to operate into the future.
- Requires the State Parks and Recreation Commission to submit a progress report to the Legislature by December 1, 2007, and final plan and recommendations by December 1, 2008.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Blake, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Grant, Hailey, Kagi, Lantz, McCoy, Newhouse, Orcutt and VanDeWege.

Staff: Jaclyn Ford (786-7339).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center (NWAC) provides weather and avalanche forecasts and information for Washington and northern Oregon through phone consultations, public hotline recordings, and the Internet. The NWAC gathers its mountain weather data from a network that includes direct observers, the National Weather Service, and the 42 weather stations that it maintains or helps to maintain. The NWAC staff also presents avalanche, weather, and snow safety seminars.

The NWAC is currently administered by the United States Forest Service and housed at the National Weather Service office in Seattle. The NWAC is funded cooperatively, with contributions from entities including the Forest Service, National Park Service, state and local governments, and private organizations.

The NWAC's annual budget approaches \$300,000. For 2006, Washington State agencies provided about 45 percent of the NWAC's funding. The State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) provided \$89,000, and the Washington Department of Transportation provided \$45,000.

Summary of Bill:

The Commission will invite the United States Forest Service, the National Weather Service, and the National Park Service to cooperatively develop an intergovernmental plan and recommendations that would allow the NWAC to continue operating at its current level of service into the future.

In addition to the federal agencies already mentioned, the Commission may also invite the Washington Department of Transportation, the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, the United States Department of Transportation, and other relevant state and federal entities, as well as relevant local governments, including counties along the Cascade Mountain range, and private organizations to participate in the plan and recommendations.

In developing the plan and recommendations, the Commission will address issues such as the administration of the NWAC, the physical location of the NWAC, administration of NWAC employees, equipment, and facilities, and the continuing cooperative funding for the NWAC.

Neither the Commission nor any other state agency may assume administrative control of the NWAC, its employees, its equipment, or its facilities without specific legislative authorization.

The Commission will provide an update on the development of the plan and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2007. The final plan and recommendations are due to the Legislature by December 1, 2008.

This legislation expires June 30, 2009.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The NWAC is fighting for funding. Budget cuts have caused concerns that the NWAC may not be able to operate effectively anymore without additional funding. There is a need to maintain consistent funding for the NWAC. Avalanches are one of the leading disasters in Washington, yet there is minimal funding to forecast avalanches. The United States Forest Service has mentioned that they would discontinue servicing the NWAC if Washington does not continue funding.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Alex Morgan and Benj Wadsworth, Friends of the Avalanche Center; and Mark Moore, Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Kenny Kramer, Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center.