

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1972

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources
General Government Appropriations

Title: An act relating to accessing land for outdoor recreation.

Brief Description: Regarding access to information for outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Sponsors: Representatives Dunshee, Blake and Williams.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/10/09, 2/19/09 [DPS];
General Government Appropriations: 2/26/09 [DPS(AGNR)].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to collect information relating to outdoor recreational access on a page of its website that is only accessible to license holders.
- Increases the cost of a vehicle use permit issued by the WDFW in steps from \$10 to \$30.
- Permits individuals who purchase a wildlife-themed or personalized license plate to park at land access sites managed by the WDFW without having to display a vehicle use permit.
- Allows the WDFW to use revenues generated from vehicle use permits for the land maintenance.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass.
Signed by 12 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Jacks, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Smith, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Lias, McCoy, Nelson, Ormsby, Pearson, Van De Wege and Warnick.

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.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117)

Background:

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Licensing.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) offers many different recreational fishing and hunting licenses. A license from the WDFW is generally required prior to taking any game or fish species in the state. Revenue from the sale of recreational licenses are deposited, in most cases, into the State Wildlife Account.

In addition to issuing licenses that allow for hunting and fishing on most types of ownership in the state, the WDFW also manages land specifically for recreational access. Land managed by the WDFW is open for hunting and fishing as well as for non-consumptive wildlife activities such as bird watching.

A person needs to obtain a vehicle use permit issued by the WDFW to enter land managed by the WDFW that has been improved for public access. One vehicle use permit is issued free of charge with certain recreational fishing and hunting licenses and with the WDFW's watchable wildlife decal (Decal). The Decal is a sticker sold by the WDFW to raise funds for nature-watching activities.

If someone wishes to access land managed by the WDFW but has not purchased a Decal or a license, that person may purchase just a vehicle use permit for \$10. Revenue from the sale of vehicle use permits must be used by the WDFW for the stewardship and maintenance of improved access facilities.

Department of Licensing.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) offers a number of speciality license plates. These plates include three different versions of official state license plates that feature wildlife species native to Washington. The DOL also offers Washington motorists the option of personalizing their license plates with a unique set of numbers and letters that they choose.

Revenue generated by the DOL from the sale of wildlife-themed license plates and personalized license plates is provided to the WDFW.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Access Information.

The WDFW is authorized to develop information relating to land access on its Internet website and limit Internet access to the information to individuals who have purchased a recreational license from the WDFW. Information contained on the WDFW's website may include information about wildlife areas and access sites, other public and private lands open for public recreation, and information promoting watchable wildlife and nature-based tourism. General information relating to hunting or fishing seasons may not be displayed on the password-protected portion of the website.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) would be responsible for adopting a rule that clarifies which of the recreational licenses offered by the WDFW would also grant the purchaser access to the information on the WDFW website. Regardless of decisions made by the Commission, a person who purchases a vehicle use permit must be provided with access to the website's information.

Vehicle Use Permit.

Individuals that purchase a wildlife-themed or personalized license plate may park at a land access site managed by the WDFW without having to display a vehicle use permit. Those without the proper license plates, or those who have not purchased a hunting or fishing license, must still purchase a vehicle use permit to park at access sites managed by the WDFW. The cost of a vehicle use permit is increased. The cost is raised from \$10 to \$20 until July 1, 2011. After that, the cost will increase to \$25 and increase to \$30 on July 1, 2013.

The WDFW may use revenues generated by vehicle use permits for land maintenance and other tangible improvements to land, and not just for facility maintenance.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill did not allow individuals to use access sites managed by the WDFW without a vehicle access permit if they have a wildlife-themed or personalized license plate and did not allow the WDFW to use revenue generated from the sale of vehicle access permits for land maintenance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are many more outdoor recreationalists who do not hunt and fish than there are sportsmen in the state. However, much of the habitat management and recreational access enhancements are funded by the hunting and fishing community. The WDFW has long struggled with finding a way for people other than hunters and fishers to contribute financially to habitat management. This bill represents a way for the folks who prefer binoculars over guns to help fund access and habitat improvements.

The price of a vehicle use permit is currently set too low. Wildlife watchers should pay more for the right to access land managed by the WDFW and provide a way for the WDFW to fund wildlife-watching programs. There is good land access available to hikers and bikers, and they should help fund some of the programs supporting that access.

The current WDFW website has a lot of great information about recreational land access on the web page dedicated to hunting. Requiring a person other than a hunter or a fisher to purchase a vehicle use permit prior to accessing that information is a preferred alternative to requiring a land access fee and would allow the WDFW to focus on the needs of wildlife watchers.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Dunshee, prime sponsor; and Steve Pozzanghera, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Darneille, Chair; Takko, Vice Chair; McCune, Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Blake, Dunshee, Hudgins, Kenney, Pedersen, Sells, Short, Van De Wege and Williams.

Staff: Charlie Gavigan (786-7340)

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On General Government Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Agriculture & Natural Resources:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill enhances habitat management and lets wildlife watchers contribute to habitat improvements.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Dunshee, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.