

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1957

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation, March 23, 2009

Title: An act relating to qualified applicants and procedures within the Washington wildlife and recreation program.

Brief Description: Identifying qualified applicants and procedures within the Washington wildlife and recreation program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Capital Budget (originally sponsored by Representatives Jacks, Warnick and Van De Wege).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/09, 64-32.

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 3/16/09, 3/23/09 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Ranker, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Stevens and Swecker.

Staff: Sherry McNamara (786-7402)

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 Recreation and Conservation Funding Board submits a list of prioritized projects to the Governor and the Legislature for approval.

If appropriations for a biennium total \$40 million or less, half of the WWRP funding is distributed to the Habitat Conservation Account and half to the Outdoor Recreation Account. If biennial funding is more than \$40 million, a portion of the funding is distributed to the Riparian Protection Account and the Farmlands Preservation Account.

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.

In the Habitat Conservation Account and the Riparian Protection Account, allowable uses of funds include mitigation banking projects. A mitigation bank means a site where habitat is created, restored, enhanced, or preserved to offset authorized project impacts to similar areas.

The state Conservation Commission provides grants and technical assistance to local conservation districts throughout the state.

Nonprofit nature conservancies acquire land and purchase conservation easements to preserve land that is under private ownership.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Nonprofit nature conservancy organizations and associations and the state's Conservation Commission are added to the list of eligible recipients for grants from the Riparian Protection Account and the Farmland Preservation Account. Nonprofit organizations or associations must provide matching funds.

Mitigation banking projects are removed from the list of allowable uses of the Habitat Conservation Account and the Riparian Protection Account.

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) must, within existing funds, evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using various land preservation mechanisms, such as fee simple acquisitions, conservation easements, term conservation easements, and leases. The RCO must report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2010.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): Requires the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), within existing funds, to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using various land preservation mechanisms, such as fee simple acquisitions, conservation easements, term conservation easements, and leases. The RCO must report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2010.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Adding nonprofit Nature Conservancy organizations and associations to the list of eligible recipients for WWRP grants creates competition which is healthy for acquiring quality projects. In addition, local nonprofits can move quickly and sometimes rural people are more willing to work with them instead of the state agencies. The nonprofits will provide a 50 percent match in funds which will make WWRP funding available to a greater number of projects. Currently, only local governments are eligible to participate in the Farmland Preservation Account grants. This bill adds the Conservation Commission which will help to keep working farms operating in this state. This bill removes the mitigation banking from the projects acceptable under WWRP; these type of projects are expensive to administer and did not compete well in the grant program.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Marcia Fromhold, Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition; Eric Eler, Washington Association of Land Trusts/Capitol Land Trust; Bill Robinson, The Nature Conservancy; Jack Field, Washington Cattlemen's Association.