

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2349

As Passed House:
February 10, 2012

Title: An act relating to the management of beavers.

Brief Description: Concerning the management of beavers.

Sponsors: House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Kretz, Blake, Billig, Short, Hinkle, Upthegrove, Fitzgibbon and McCune).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/18/12, 1/31/12 [DPS];
General Government Appropriations & Oversight: 2/3/12 [DPS(AGNR)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/10/12, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Provides the Department of Fish and Wildlife with specific authority to permit the release of captured beavers on public or private property if the landowner of the property consents to the release.
- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife to help connect landowners with excess beavers with landowners who want additional beavers on their property.
- Requires the convening of a beaver management stakeholder's forum.

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; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Wilcox, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buys, Dunshee, Finn, Hinkle, Kretz, Lytton, Orcutt, Pettigrew and Van De Wege.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS & OVERSIGHT

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Moscoso, Vice Chair; McCune, Ranking Minority Member; Taylor, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Ahern, Armstrong, Blake, Fitzgibbon, Ladenburg, Pedersen, Van De Wege and Wilcox.

Staff: Michael Bennion (786-7118).

Background:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has the authority to authorize the removal or killing of wildlife that is destroying or injuring property. The ultimate disposition of the removed wildlife is determined by the Director of the Department (Director). The Director may also enter into written agreements with landowners designed to protect the subject property from further wildlife damage.

Private individuals may trap beavers if they hold a state trapping license. All trapping must be conducted in accordance with the trapping seasons established by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is specifically authorized to permit the release of captured beavers on public or private property if the landowner of the property consents to the release. Beaver relocations may be limited by the Department to areas of the state where there is a low probability of released beavers becoming a problem, where there is evidence of a historic endemic beaver population, and where conditions exist for the released beavers to improve the riparian area into which they are introduced.

The Department may condition beaver relocations to maximize the success and minimize the risk of the relocation. Release site conditions that the Department may consider include the gradient of the stream, the adequacy of food sources, the elevation, and the stream geomorphology. In addition, the Department may also condition how the capture and release occurs. This includes establishing the timing of the capture and release, the age of the beavers involved, the number of beavers involved, and the requirements for providing supplemental food and lodging materials.

The Department is also directed to inform a person who expresses a desire for beavers of any known location that has a surplus of beavers available. The website maintained by the Department must display a quarterly updated report of nuisance beaver activity, beaver trapping events, and all beaver relocation reported to the Department. A beaver management stakeholder's forum must be convened by the Department by January 1, 2013.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Agriculture & Natural Resources):

(In support) There are many complaints about beaver nuisances that are addressed through the killing of the offending beaver. However, these issues can often be handled non-lethally by live trapping the beaver in question and relocating it to an area where its inherent industriousness can be utilized to enhance high elevation water storage, to increase in-stream river flows, and to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Beavers are a keystone species whose success allows other species to flourish. The Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) current lethal beaver removal policy is inconsistent with current science on the issue.

The current beaver relocation process is laden with red tape even though the relocations that have occurred have proved very successful. The process could be done far more efficiently for the state and the person interested in relocating beavers. Billions of dollars are spent by humans to artificially engineer habitat and landscape changes that beavers will do naturally if they are given the chance.

Public outreach and education is important in beaver relocations. Many landowners want beavers on their property but have problems getting them located. To be viable, an entire beaver family must be relocated and there has to be an investment in public education so landowners understand that fact. Viable beaver relocation also requires improved communication between the Department, local governments, and affirmative connections between landowners with too many beavers and landowners who want additional beavers.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (General Government Appropriations & Oversight):

(In support) Since 2006 our organization has relocated 47 nuisance beavers; we found that if we moved them from where they were causing property damage to areas higher in the water shed we would have better water storage and thus habitat. The substitute bill reduces the fiscal note cost. We focus on relocation to eastern and northeastern Washington because of the high population density in western Washington and complexity in notifying property owners.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Agriculture & Natural Resources): Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; and Amanda Parrish, The Lands Council.

Persons Testifying (General Government Appropriations & Oversight): Neil Beaver, The Lands Council.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Agriculture & Natural Resources): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (General Government Appropriations & Oversight): None.