
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

SSB 5264

Brief Description: Requiring a study of Mazama pocket gophers.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Marine Waters (originally sponsored by Senators Swecker and Sheldon).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to conduct a biological status update of the Mazama pocket gopher and, if protection or management of the species is warranted, to submit a recovery plan to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2012.

Hearing Date: 3/15/11

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

Management of Protected Species.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is responsible for maintaining a list of protected and endangered species in Washington. “Endangered” species is defined as any wildlife species native to Washington that is seriously threatened with extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the state. Protected species includes three subcategories:

- “Threatened” means any wildlife species native to Washington that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout a significant portion of its range within the state without cooperative management or removal of threats.

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.

- “Sensitive” means any wildlife species native to Washington that is vulnerable or declining and is likely to become endangered or threatened in a significant portion of its range within the state without cooperative management or removal of threats.
- “Other” which is undefined.

With certain exceptions, the general procedure for listing a native wildlife species of Washington as protected requires the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to determine that a species is in danger of failing or declining, or is vulnerable and, if so, to conduct a preliminary species status report, open a public review period of at least 90 days, and submit a final status report and listing recommendation to the Commission. The Commission may also request the WDFW to review a species of concern.

Before making a classification recommendation to the Commission, the WDFW must prepare a preliminary species status report that includes but is not limited to:

- historic, current, and future species population trends;
- natural history, including ecological relationships (e.g. food habits, home range, habitat selection patterns);
- historic and current habitat trends;
- population demographics (e.g. survival and mortality rates, reproductive success) and their relationship to long term sustainability; and
- historic and current species management activities.

After the WDFW has provided at least 90 days for public review of their species status report in order to provide interested parties with the opportunity to submit new scientific data relevant to the status report, classification recommendation, and any State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) findings, the WDFW must submit to the Commission a final status report, classification recommendation, and any SEPA documents. Notice of the proposed commission action must be published at least 30 days prior to the commission meeting.

The WDFW must conduct a review of each endangered, threatened, or sensitive wildlife species at least every five years after the date of its listing. The review must include an updated species status report to determine whether the status of the species warrants its current listing or requires reclassification (WAC 232-12-297).

Mazama Pocket Gopher.

According to the WDFW's species status report, the Mazama pocket gopher (also known as *Thomomys mazama*) is a small burrowing rodent native to western Washington, western Oregon, and northern California. Found in grassland and prairie habitats of mainly Clark, Mason, Pierce, and Thurston Counties, certain subspecies can also be found in parts of Olympic National Park.

The Mazama pocket gopher has long nails and incisors, short brown fur, and measures eight inches in length (including its 2.5 inch tail) when fully grown. It lives underground and relies solely on a diet of vegetation. In addition, a Mazama pocket gopher has two fur-lined pouches extending from the lower portion of its face to its shoulders that can be turned inside out. They are closely related to the kangaroo mouse, the kangaroo rat, and the pocket mouse.

The Washington population of the Mazama pocket gopher became a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2002. In 2005, the WDFW submitted to the Commission a species status report recommending that the Mazama pocket gopher be listed as threatened due to a reduced population and habitat loss. The Commission listed the Mazama pocket gopher as threatened in 2006.

Summary of Bill:

The WDFW is directed to conduct a biological status update of the Mazama pocket gopher using existing resources and, if protection or management of the species is warranted, to submit a recovery plan to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2012. The report must be based on the best available science and include:

- data on whether the population of Mazama pocket gophers are in danger of failing, declining, or are vulnerable due to disease, predation, exploitation, or habitat loss or change;
- an analysis of the historic, current, and future population trends of the Mazama pocket gopher;
- historic and current habitat trends of the Mazama pocket gopher;
- population demographics and their relationship to long-term sustainability of the Mazama pocket gopher; and
- historic and current species management activities of the Mazama pocket gopher.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 11, 2011.

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