

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6387

As Passed House:
February 29, 2012

Title: An act relating to state parks, recreation, and natural resources fiscal matters.

Brief Description: Concerning state parks, recreation, and natural resources fiscal matters.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Energy, Natural Resources & Marine Waters (originally sponsored by Senator Ranker).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

General Government Appropriations & Oversight: 2/22/12, 2/23/12 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/29/12, 59-39.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires county treasurers to remit money received from certain violations relating to the display of the Discover Pass, the vehicle access pass, and day-use permits to the State Treasurer.
- Requires the State Treasurer to deposit the money in the Recreation Access Pass Account.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS & OVERSIGHT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Moscoso, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Blake, Fitzgibbon, Ladenburg, Pedersen and Van De Wege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives McCune, Ranking Minority Member; Taylor, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Ahern and Wilcox.

Staff: Michael Bennion (786-7118).

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.

Background:

The State Parks system, the fourth oldest in the nation, includes 117 developed parks on over 100,000 total acres. Each year the system sees well over 40 million visitors, with many using one of the over 2,000 modern camping sites or other overnight accommodation, holding events with use of group facilities, or simply for day-use recreating purposes.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) are charged with managing the public lands of the state. Until July 1, 2011, there was no charge to the public for access to both the DNR or State Parks land and recreation sites. The WDFW charged \$10 for the annual fish and wildlife lands vehicle use permit, or the permit was provided free of charge with all hunting and fishing licenses.

State Parks have historically been funded with varying levels of State General Fund. In response to reductions in General Fund support, and in an effort to make the State Parks self-supporting, agency request and subsequently enacted legislation in 2011 created the Discover Pass permit as a way to increase contributions from users.

The Discover Pass allows for vehicle access in designated recreational areas located on state lands owned or managed by the DNR, the WDFW, and the State Parks. The Discover Pass is the only pass needed to access recreational sites such as trailheads, parking areas, winter recreation areas, boat launches, and water trails. Visitors wishing to park on state recreational lands must obtain an annual Discover Pass or a day-use permit allowing vehicle access. Revenues from the Discover Pass are first deposited into the Recreation Access Pass Account prior to being distributed to the agencies.

A Discover Pass or day-use permit must be visible in a vehicle. Failure to display the Discover Pass or the day-use permit is a natural resource infraction with a penalty of \$99. If an annual Discover Pass is purchased within 15 days after notice of an infraction, the penalty is reduced to \$59. District courts have jurisdiction over natural resource infractions, including Discover Pass violations. In most instances, 32 percent of the fines assessed or collected through a district court are provided to the state for deposit in the State General Fund, while the remaining is retained by the county. Fines assessed and collected for county parking infractions are retained by the county.

Summary of Bill:

The bill redirects revenue derived from Discover Pass violations from local governments and the State General Fund to the Recreation Access Pass Account.

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:

(In support) State Parks believes this is a helpful attempt to improve the financing of Washington state parks. State Parks supports the way this bill would direct natural resource infraction revenue that comes from fines assessed for natural resource infractions by state agency enforcement officers. This bill is part of a package of bills aimed at saving State Parks. To save State Parks requires more ideas and not relying entirely on staffing reductions.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Daniel Farber, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission; and Alia Griffins, Washington Federation of State Employees.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.