

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6387

As of March 1, 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: Senator Ranker.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Natural Resources & Marine Waters: 1/19/12.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, NATURAL RESOURCES & MARINE WATERS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: The State Parks and Recreation Commission (SPRC). The Legislature has charged the SPRC with care and control over lands set aside for park purposes, including approximately 120 developed parks. Statutes provide the SPRC with broad policy and rulemaking authority over management of the state's park system. Other SPRC responsibilities include recreational boater safety and education and winter recreation.

Discover Pass Program. During the 2011 regular session, the Legislature passed 2SSB 5622 which generally requires an annual Discover Pass or day-use permit for access to certain recreation lands managed by SPRC, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW). The legislation also created DFW Vehicle Access Pass, which is issued along with certain hunting and fishing licenses and allows access to DFW managed lands. Revenues from the Discover Pass are deposited in the Recreation Access Pass Account (RAPA) and distributed to SPRC, DNR, and DFW according to a statutory formula.

Penalties from Discover Pass Violations. The failure to comply with the Discover or DFW Vehicle Access Pass requirement is a natural resources infraction. The penalty is \$99, but is reduced to \$59 if an individual purchases a Discover Pass within 15 days of issuance of a notice of violation. District Courts have jurisdiction over natural resources infractions, including Discover Pass-related violations. Generally, 32 percent of fines assessed or collected through a District Court are provided to the state for deposit in the state General Fund, while the remainder is retained by the county. All fines assessed and collected for county parking infractions are retained by the county.

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.

SPRC Appropriations in the 2011-13 Operating Budget. The current 2011-13 operating budget provides a state General Fund appropriation to SPRC of approximately \$8.95 million for the 2012 fiscal year and \$8.38 million for the 2013 fiscal year. The operating budget includes a proviso indicating that this funding is provided to operate the State Parks system as SPRC implements a fee structure to make it self-supporting.

Summary of Bill: Shifts the Disposition of Discover Pass Penalties. A County Treasurer must provide monies received as a result of the failure to comply with a Discover or DFW Vehicle Access Pass requirement to the state, for deposit in RACA.

Shifts SPRC State General Fund Funding to the 2012 Fiscal Year. The 2011-13 operating budget is amended to appropriate all of the biennial General Fund state monies appropriated to SPRC for the 2012 fiscal year. The associated proviso is amended to reflect the change in appropriation. Proviso language is also added directing the SPRC to prioritize any necessary staff reductions on vacant positions, headquarters and regional staff, and construction and maintenance staff prior to reducing park rangers and enforcement officers.

Appropriation: Amends appropriations to SPRC in the 2011-13 Operating Budget.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: OTHER: The Legislature's support of parks and its efforts to change Discover Pass transferability provisions are much appreciated. The shift of state General Fund dollars for the biennium to the 2012 fiscal year is not a major solution to its funding problems, and presumes that State Parks will not receive state General Fund in the future. There is also concern about funding liability regarding the direction to prioritize certain actions as part of the reduction process, although that policy decision is indeed the Legislature's call. Allowing Discover Pass penalties to fund recreation could create a public image issue as it could create self-interest to increase enforcement.

Persons Testifying: OTHER: Daniel Farber, WA State Parks and Recreation Commission; Jim King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation.