

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2517

As Reported by House Committee On:

Agriculture & Natural Resources

Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government & Information Technology

Title: An act relating to wildlife conflict funding to encourage proactive measures.

Brief Description: Concerning wildlife conflict funding to encourage proactive measures.

Sponsors: Representatives Blake, Kretz and Buys.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/30/14, 1/31/14 [DPS];

Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government & Information Technology:
2/27/14 [DP2S(w/o sub AGNR)].

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Creates a new account from which the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) can make compensation payments due to losses of crops or livestock from deer, elk, bears, wolves, or cougars.
- Requires the State Treasurer to transfer any unspent amounts of State Wildlife Account funds the WDFW is authorized to use for compensation to the new account each year.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Lytton, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dunshee, Haigh, Kretz, Orcutt, Schmick, Stanford and Warnick.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Van De Wege.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

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.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is directed to, subject to funding limits, monetarily compensate the owners of commercial crops damaged by deer or elk and the owners of livestock that are killed or significantly injured by bears, cougars, or wolves. Each individual claim by a crop or livestock owner is eligible to be paid the value of the lost crop or animal, less any payments received by a nonprofit organization, up to a maximum of \$10,000.

Funding for the WDFW to provide compensation comes primarily from three separate statutory authorities. For deer and elk damage, the WDFW may pay up to \$120,000 from the Wildlife Account each fiscal year. On top of that authority, the WDFW may use up to an additional \$30,000 from the General Fund for the same purposes.

In addition, the WDFW may spend up to \$50,000 per fiscal year from the Wildlife Account to pay claims and assessment costs for injuries and losses to commercial livestock from wolves. Any portions of the authorized \$50,000 that are unspent at the end of any biennium must be transferred to the Wolf-Livestock Conflict Account (Wolf Account). Expenditures from the Wolf Account are to be used for the mitigation, assessment, and payment of claims for livestock losses due to wolf predation. The WDFW must pay wolf compensation claims in the chronological order they were confirmed. Confirmed claims in one fiscal biennium may be paid from the Wolf Account in a future biennium.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A new, unappropriated account is created to be managed by the WDFW. The account is called the Wildlife Conflict Account (Conflict Account). The Conflict Account may only be used for the prevention, mitigation, assessment, and payments for injury to, and loss of, property caused by deer, elk, bears, wolves, or cougars. Like the Wolf Account, the WDFW must pay compensation claims from the Conflict Account in the chronological order they were confirmed, and confirmed claims in one fiscal biennium may be paid from the Conflict Account in a future biennium.

The Conflict Account is primarily funded through fund transfers undertaken by the State Treasurer. If the WDFW has not spent up to its full authority in compensation for deer and elk damage (\$120,000 from the Wildlife Account and \$30,000 from the General Fund) by the end of a fiscal year, the remaining unspent amount must be transferred to the Conflict Account.

The WDFW is also given the authority to spend up to an additional \$50,000 each fiscal year from the General Fund for injury and losses caused by bears, wolves, and cougars. Just as with the authorized expenditures for deer and elk damage, any remaining unspent amount must be transferred to the Conflict Account at the end of each fiscal year.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill limits portions of the bill originally applicable to all large carnivores to bears, wolves, and cougars only.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The Legislature conducted a substantial rewrite of the statutes on wildlife conflicts in 2009. At that time, the WDFW was tasked with monitoring the implementation of the new statutes and making recommendations for how they could work better. This bill contains those recommendations.

The new account created in the bill is modeled after the Wolf Account so that similar flexibility is available for deer and elk damage compensation. Using money to help prevent damage from occurring is a less expensive alternative to paying compensation once the damage occurs. This is a big step towards addressing the challenges of carnivore predation. The WDFW has the authority to compensate livestock owners but no steady funding to do so. Allowing the money to roll over until a rainy day is wise since everyone knows that rainy days are on the horizon.

The current system works well for deer and elk damage, but as the end of the year approaches, some legitimate claims do not get paid because the compensation limits were reached for that year. That problem is solved by allowing the claims to carry over from one year to the next.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Dave Ware, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Jack Field, Washington Cattleman's Association; and Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Parker, Ranking Minority Member; Buys, Christian, Jinkins, Springer and Taylor.

Staff: Dan Jones (786-7118).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government & Information Technology Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Agriculture & Natural Resources:

The second substitute bill removes the authority to spend an additional \$50,000 from the State Wildlife Account for wildlife conflicts and removes the direction to roll over any excess State General Fund amounts into the new Wildlife Conflict Account. The second substitute bill adds a null and void clause, making the bill null and void unless funded in the budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Second Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) None.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.