

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5084

As of February 1, 2013

Title: An act relating to discounted discovery passes for disabled veterans.

Brief Description: Concerning discounted discovery passes for disabled veterans.

Sponsors: Senators Benton, Bailey, Shin, Padden, Becker, Litzow, Dammeier, Roach, Carrell and Pearson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/24/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) are charged with managing the public lands of the state. The DFW owns or manages nearly 1 million acres of public land for fish and wildlife, habitat conservation, and wildlife-related recreation. The DNR protects and manages 5.6 million acres of state-owned land. State Parks manages 117 developed parks on over 100,000 total acres.

Until July 1, 2011, there was no charge to the public for access to DNR or State Parks land and recreational sites. DFW 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 has historically been funded with varying levels of the state general fund. In response to reductions in general fund support, and in an effort to make State Parks self-supporting, in 2011 the Legislature created the Discover Pass permit as a way to increase contributions from users.

The Discover Pass allows visitors to park or drive in designated recreational areas located on state lands owned or managed by DNR, DFW, and State Parks. Visitors to state recreational lands must obtain an annual Discover Pass or a day-use permit allowing vehicle access for one calendar day. The Discover Pass permit is valid for two vehicles for 12 months from the point of purchase at a cost of \$30, while a day-use permit costs \$10. A volunteer who performs 24 hours of service on agency-sanctioned projects in a given year is entitled to receive a complimentary Discover Pass.

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.

There are certain limited exceptions to the requirement to have a Discover Pass. Holders of certain hunting and fishing licenses may access DFW recreation lands and water-access sites if they possess a DFW provided Vehicle Access Pass. Some special interest groups are also entitled by law to receive free or discounted access passes to state parks. These passes include the senior citizen's pass, a disability pass, a lifetime veteran's disability pass, and a foster home pass. Any Washington resident who is a veteran and has a service-connected disability of at least 30 percent can get a lifetime veteran's disability pass entitling the veteran to free use of any campsite and free admission to any state park.

The Discover Pass was originally projected to raise \$64 million dollars in revenue during the 2011-13 biennium, with 84 percent, or \$54 million dollars, going to State Parks and 8 percent each to DFW and DNR to operate the recreation lands under their management. Based on collections so far, the Discover Pass is now projected to raise \$33 million dollars for the 2011-13 biennium.

Summary of Bill: The cost of a Discover Pass is \$5 for any person who has been provided with a lifetime veterans disability pass from State Parks. Statutory references containing exceptions to the requirement to have a Discover Pass are updated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2013.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We are in support of disabled vets who generally have very limited incomes getting a low cost or free permit. We do not want to preclude access to our state lands from disabled veterans who have served our country.

CON: State Parks is struggling to stay afloat. This is an expansion of the give aways that are already in statute and impact the bottom line. If this bill passes, the \$27.2 million problem becomes even greater.

OTHER: We are concerned that other disabled individuals are not being treated the same. This may be a violation of the American Disabilities Act. We need an equitable Discover Pass program to balance the interests of lost revenue for exemptions and giving access to those who cannot afford to pay. Some individuals impacted under this bill may have the ability to pay. Legislators should hear all bills and work out an equitable bill at the end of the day that continues to fund State Parks.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Joan Fleming, Back Country Horsemen of WA.

CON: Don Hall, WA State Federation of State Employees.

OTHER: Burt Dezihan, citizen; Greg Schirato, DFW; Daniel Farber, State Parks; James King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation.