

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5193

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, February 14, 2013

Title: An act relating to large wild carnivore conflict management.

Brief Description: Concerning large wild carnivore conflict management.

Sponsors: Senators Smith, Roach, Honeyford and Delvin; by request of Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/29/13, 2/14/13 [DPS-WM, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5193 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Smith, Vice Chair; Hargrove, Hewitt, Parlette and Rolfes, Ranking Member.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Kline.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Role of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) Generally. DFW serves as manager of the state's fish and wildlife resources. Among other duties, DFW must protect, perpetuate, and establish the basic rules and regulations governing the harvest of fish and wildlife.

Wildlife Damage Compensation. The Legislature has authorized DFW to manage a wildlife damage compensation program that compensates commercial crop owners for damage from elk and deer. The program also compensates commercial livestock owners for damage from cougars, wolves, and bears.

Specifically, a commercial livestock owner may receive compensation for cattle, sheep, and horses injured or killed by bears, wolves, or cougars. DFW may only pay claims:

- using amounts specifically appropriated for this purpose; and

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- up to statutorily specified amounts per animal.

Under the livestock damage compensation program, commercial livestock include cattle, sheep, and horses held or raised by a person for sale.

Big Game Designation. There are 11 species of wildlife that are designated as big game. These species include most wild ungulates, cougars, and bears. There are specific penalties, responsibilities, and prohibitions that apply only to big game species. For instance, there are enhanced penalties for wildlife-related crimes that involve big game species.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): Establishes a Wildlife Account-Based Funding Mechanism for Livestock Damage Caused by Wolves. Authorizes DFW to pay not more than \$50,000 per year from the state Wildlife Account for claims and assessment costs for injury to or the loss of livestock caused by wolves. DFW may also accept and spend funds from other sources to address damage to livestock or other property, consistent with the requirements of that funding source.

Any unspent amounts of the \$50,000 at the end of the fiscal year are transferred to a newly created Wolf-livestock Conflict Account. This account is non-appropriated and may be used for mitigation, assessment, and payments for livestock damage caused by wolves. DFW may also deposit grants, gifts, or donations into the account.

DFW must maintain a list of claims for livestock damage caused by wolves, organized chronologically based on the date of the wolf predation. DFW must pay claims in the order they appear on the list as funding becomes available through annual Wildlife Account funding or other sources. This includes authority and direction to pay claims for livestock damage that occurred in previous biennia.

Creates a Washington Wolves Special License Plate. The Washington wolves special license plate is established. The initial fee for the plate is \$40, and a \$30 fee is charged upon renewal. Plate revenues must be deposited in the State Wildlife Account and dedicated to non-lethal wolf management and payments for livestock damage caused by wolves.

Modifies Payment Eligibility. A livestock owner may receive compensation for damage to cattle, sheep, or horses regardless of whether they are involved in commercial agriculture or the animal is specifically raised for sale.

Additionally, the Fish and Wildlife Commission must adopt rules setting limits and conditions for expenditures on claims, assessments, and mitigating actions for livestock as well as crop and other property damage.

Big Game Designation. The gray wolf is added to the list of species that are considered to be big game. Statutes establishing penalties, responsibilities, and prohibitions exclusive to big game species apply to the gray wolf by reference to the new definition.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute):

- Provides that the annual Wildlife Account funding for livestock damage is for damage caused by wolves, and allows unspent amounts at the end of a fiscal year to roll into a new dedicated account that can pay damage claims chronologically and across multiple biennia.
- Specifies that the special license plate revenues deposited in the Wildlife Account may be used for livestock damage funding in addition to DFW's non-lethal wolf management efforts.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

[OFM requested ten-year cost projection pursuant to I-960.]

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: The wolf plan should be implemented, including finding sustainable funding for wolf management and livestock damage compensation. While the funding is much needed, there are concerns that the \$50,000 is not enough to cover livestock losses that will occur from predation. The treatment of wolves as a big game species is appropriate as it will allow for increased opportunities for management.

CON: There are concerns that defining the wolf as a big game species will contribute to promotion of lethal removal and hunting.

OTHER: There is a need for non-lethal management education, community outreach, and coordination of implementation across multiple agencies. While the funding is much needed, there are concerns that the \$50,000 is not enough to cover livestock losses that will occur from predation. The funding from the special license plate should not be limited, as the wolf plan does call for lethal action in some circumstances. This is a serious issue that significantly impacts people.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Dave Ware, DFW; Tyler Cox, Bill Sieverkropp, Jess Kayser, Pace Amidon, Brad Cameron, WA Cattlemen's Assn.; Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner; Sheilah Kennedy, Okanogan County Commissioner; Mike Manus, Pend Oreille County Commissioner; Brad Miller, Ferry County Commissioner; Tom Davis, WA Farm Bureau.

CON: Melinda Hirsch, Center for Biological Diversity; Bob McCoy, Jeff Hamm, citizens.

OTHER: Diane Gallegos, Wolf Haven International; Tom Davis, WA Farm Bureau.