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**Agriculture & Natural Resources  
Committee**

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**HB 1654**

**Brief Description:** Controlling noxious weeds while still supporting pollen-rich forage plant communities for honey bees.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Peterson, Lytton, Fitzgibbon, Blake and Walkinshaw.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Commissions a pilot project by the Noxious Weed Control Board that evaluates the advantages of replacing pollen-rich noxious weeds with native forage plants that can product similar levels of pollen to support honeybee populations.
- Requires state agencies, as part their mandate to control noxious weeds on the land they manage, to give preference, when practicable, to replacing pollen-rich noxious weeds with native bee forage plants.

**Hearing Date:** 2/4/15

**Staff:** Jason Callahan (786-7117).

**Background:**

Noxious Weeds.

A noxious weed is plant that, when established, is highly destructive, competitive, or difficult to control (RCW 17.10.010). The state maintains an active list of noxious weeds present in Washington and categorizes the plants on the list into one of three categories. These categories are designated as class A, class B, and class C.

Class A weeds are those noxious weeds that are not native to Washington and are of limited distribution or are unrecorded in Washington yet could cause a serious threat if established. Class B weeds are non-native plants that are of limited distribution in a region of the state but

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that could cause a serious threat in that region. Class C weeds are all other noxious weeds (RCW 17.10.010).

Noxious weeds are identified and listed by the State Noxious Weed Control Board (Weed Board). The Weed Board is required to adopt a statewide noxious weed list at least once a year following a public hearing (RCW 17.10.080). Once a state noxious weed list is adopted, county noxious weed control boards must select weeds identified on the state list for inclusion on the local noxious weed list for that county (RCW 17.10.090). Each county is empowered to have a noxious weed control board within its jurisdiction (RCW 17.10.020).

Once a weed is included on a county's weed list, certain responsibilities apply to landowners within that county. Landowners are responsible for eradicating all class A weeds as well as controlling the spread of class B and class C weeds listed on the county list (RCW 17.10.140). The enforcement of violations of these duties is the responsibility of the county weed boards (RCW 17.10.170).

All state agencies are required to control noxious weeds on lands that they manage. This weed control must be done through integrated pest management practices outlined in plans developed in cooperation with county noxious weed control boards (RCW 17.10.145).

#### Honeybees.

The 2013 Legislature directed the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to convene a work group to address challenges facing the honey bee industry and to develop a report outlining solutions that bolster the use of Washington honey bees to pollinate tree fruits, berries, and seeds. The WSDA delivered the required report on December 12, 2014. In the report, bee forage and bee nutrition was identified as one of four main issues affecting honey bee health. The report concluded that access to diverse pollen and nectar sources, provided through access to diverse forage habitat, is essential for honey bees to properly meet their protein, carbohydrate, and other nutritional needs.

The report went on to cite the loss of forage to weed control as one of the challenges facing honey bees in their search for adequately diverse forage. Of the 142 plants listed as noxious weeds, at least 27 of them are identified in the report as plants that provide valuable bee forage.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

##### Pilot project.

The Weed Board is directed to conduct a pilot project that evaluates the advantages of replacing pollen-rich noxious weeds with native forage plants that can product similar levels of pollen to support honeybee populations. In developing the pilot project, the Weed Board must seek to maximize the dual public benefits of reducing noxious weeds and maintaining access to pollen forage for honeybees and apiarists.

The Weed Board must, as part of the pilot project, coordinate with willing landowners to provide plant starts, seed packs, and other goods or services necessary to replace noxious weeds with

native plants. The priority for participation must be given to private landowners; however, the Weed Board may include public landowners in the pilot project as well.

The Weed Board must report the findings from the pilot project to the Legislature by October 31, 2016. The report must include an assessment of acceptance by landowners and the apiary industry, a cost/benefit analysis around using plant replacement to decrease noxious weeds and increase bee forage, recommendations for incentivizing increased bee forage, and any other recommendations for extending the pilot project or implementing the lessons learned through the pilot project.

State Land Management.

As part of the mandate for state agencies to control noxious weeds on the land they managed, state agencies must, when practicable, give preference to replacing pollen-rich noxious weeds with native bee forage plants.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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