
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

HB 1676

Brief Description: Understanding the effects of predation on wild ungulate populations.

Sponsors: Representatives Short, Lytton, Kretz and Blake.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to conduct a peer-reviewed study assessing the health of Washington's wild ungulate population in game management units that have experienced a change in population dynamics due to the recovery of gray wolves.

Hearing Date: 2/5/15

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) operates under a legislative mandate to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage the state's wildlife. Wildlife is defined as all species of the animal kingdom whose members exist in Washington in a wild state. This includes: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates.

The WDFW, through action by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, may identify wild animals that are appropriate game animals. Many identified game animals are also ungulates. These include: deer, elk, moose, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn antelope. Game species are managed according to a multi-year game management plan. The most recently adopted game management plan will be in effect from July 2015, until June 2021. Game management by the WDFW involves breaking the state up into series of distinct areas called game management units. There are over 150 individual game management units in the state.

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 WDFW may also identify a species as endangered if it is determined that the species is seriously threatened with extinction in the state of Washington. This list of endangered species, which is maintained by administrative rule, includes the gray wolf. A conservation and management plan for the gray wolf was adopted in December of 2011. Under the wolf plan, the WDFW is directed to monitor ungulate populations in areas occupied by wolves, enhance ungulate populations wherever possible, improve ungulate habitat, manage hunting to ensure sufficient prey for wolves, reduce ungulate poaching, manage wolf-ungulate conflicts, and integrate the management of ungulates and wolves on an ecological basis.

Summary of Bill:

The WDFW is required to conduct a peer-reviewed study assessing the health of Washington's wild ungulate population in game management units that have experienced a change in population dynamics due to the recovery of gray wolves. The goal of the study is to examine ungulate population trends using both historic and current data to assess whether the ungulate population is adequate to support the predation pressure that accompanies the recovery of the gray wolf.

There are minimum elements that the WDFW must include in the study. These include: a comparison of ungulate population trends in game management units with and without wolves, a consideration of all predation pressure on wild ungulates, and the inclusion of the area known as the North Half which is part of the traditional off-reservation hunting grounds of the Colville Confederated Tribe.

The WDFW must provide the results of the study to the Legislature by October 31, 2016. The report must also include any proposed changes to ungulate population management that is informed by the results of the study.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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