

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1826

As Reported by House Committee On:
Environment

Title: An act relating to creating flexibility in the state's recreational fee-for-access programs to better accommodate families that recreate with multiple vehicles.

Brief Description: Creating flexibility in the state's recreational fee-for-access programs to better accommodate families that recreate with multiple vehicles.

Sponsors: Representatives Johnson and Blake.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Environment: 2/10/15, 2/12/15, 2/19/15 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Removes the \$50 maximum fee allowed to be charged for a family Discover Pass and allows for a fee that at least makes up for lost revenue from the sale of individual Discover Passes.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Fitzgibbon, Chair; Peterson, Vice Chair; Farrell, Fey, Goodman and McBride.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Shea, Ranking Minority Member; Short, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harris, Pike and Taylor.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

A public access pass is required to be displayed on any vehicle accessing most lands managed by the State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) or by the departments of Natural Resources or Fish and Wildlife (state recreation agencies). The 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.

must either be a Discover Pass or a Vehicle Access Pass. A Discover Pass costs \$30 for an annual pass or \$10 for a day-use permit. The Vehicle Access Pass is available free of charge to anyone who purchases certain hunting or fishing licenses and only allows access to lands managed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

A Discover Pass or day-use permit must be visibly displayed on any motor vehicle accessing state recreational sites or lands. Each Discover Pass has space to list up to two motor vehicle license plate numbers, and to be valid, the license plate on the car must match one of the two numbers written on the Discover Pass.

The state recreation agencies have the authority to offer a family Discover Pass that is fully transferable among vehicles and does not require the placement of a license plate number on the pass to be valid. However, the state recreation agencies have decided not to exercise this authority. If the state recreation agencies decide in the future to offer a family Discover Pass, they must collectively set a price for the sale of a family Discover Pass that is no more than \$50.

Revenue from the sales of Discover Passes and Vehicle Access Passes is deposited into the Recreation Pass Account and distributed to the state recreation agencies according to a set formula. Of the first \$71 million of recreation pass sales, 84 percent is distributed to the Commission, and the remainder is equally divided between the Department of Natural Resources and the WDFW. All sales above \$71 million are distributed equally among the three state recreation agencies.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The \$50 limitation on the purchase price of a family Discover Pass is removed. Instead, the state recreation agencies may set a sales price intended to at least compensate for the corresponding reduction in individual Discover Pass sales.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill would have allowed only one vehicle accessing state recreational sites or lands to display a Discover Pass if both of the vehicles that were listed on the displayed Discover Pass are accessing the same recreational site or land at the same time. The original bill also would have changed the authority to offer a family Discover Pass from discretionary to mandatory.

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) Washington is the most beautiful state in the Union, and young families should be encouraged to explore its treasures. The Discover Pass is not an insurmountable cost barrier, but the cumulative effect of small fees and charges has made visiting a park more expensive. Allowing more than one car to access the same park on the same Discover Pass will benefit families with young children.

Allowing simultaneous access solves one of the major deficiencies of the Discover Pass program: double-billing families. It is not uncommon for a person to tow a street-legal, off-road vehicle into a park behind a pickup truck. In this instance, both vehicles would need separate Discover Passes. The double billing issue is affecting park attendance and volunteerism.

(With concerns) The Discover Pass started as a one-vehicle pass. When it was expanded to a two-vehicle pass, it was clear that it still didn't allow simultaneous access. Allowing simultaneous access by two vehicles on the same Discover Pass creates significant operational and enforcement problems. It would be difficult for both the enforcement and the park visitor to be able to prove legal access and avoid the citation process, especially at dispersed recreation sites without one central port of access. Writing citations is already a challenge for enforcement personnel, as they have to bear the brunt of the public's dislike of the Discover Pass program.

At \$50, the family Discover Pass was estimated to be a money loser for the state. Flexibility in the price may help make it a viable option. There are other options for exploring the family pass idea; however, there are a number of program revision ideas that should be prioritized over the family pass. These other options will reduce the cost of the Discover Pass to the state and increase customer satisfaction.

Overall, the bill will lead to less revenue and a reduction in safe access opportunities.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Johnson, prime sponsor; and Jim Putman, Pacific Northwest 4-Wheel Drive Association.

(With concerns) Daniel Farber and Katie Manning, State Parks and Recreation Commission; Melinda Posner, Department of Fish and Wildlife; Alia Griffing, Washington Federation of State Employees; and Jed Herman, Department of Natural Resources.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Jim King.