

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1833

As Reported by House Committee On:
Environment

Title: An act relating to timing free access days at state parks with local community events.

Brief Description: Concerning timing free access days at state parks with local community events.

Sponsors: Representatives Klippert, Takko, Griffey, Wilson, Scott, Bergquist and Tarleton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

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

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Removes the maximum number of days that free access may be offered for state parks and extends free access days beyond state parks to all state recreation sites and lands.
- Allows the Director of the State Parks and Recreation Commission to designate specific days when a recreation site or land, or all recreational sites and lands, may be open for access without a Discover Pass or day-use permit.
- Provides direction as to why free access days should be made available and what days should be chosen for free access.

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).

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.

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 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).

Revenue from the sales of Discover Passes and Vehicle Access Passes are 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 (DNR) and the WDFW. All sales above \$71 million are distributed equally among the three state recreation agencies.

The Commission may designate up to 12 days during which state parks can be legally accessed without having to display a Discover Pass or day-use permit. At least three of the pass-free days at state parks must be on weekends and, when practicable, timed with similar free access days offered by the National Park Service.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Director of the Commission (Director) may designate specific days when a recreation site or land, or all recreational sites and lands, may be open for access without a Discover Pass or day-use permit. In choosing these days, the Director must consult with the DNR and the WDFW.

The free access days must be designated to showcase state parks or other recreation sites and lands and to provide equitable access for persons with limited incomes. However, the designation of free access days must be arranged to not significantly impact state finances. In choosing the free access days, the Director must consider timing the days with free days offered by the National Park Service, the commemoration of grand openings at state recreation sites and lands, local community celebrations, and other events, holidays, or days of commemoration.

The limit on only offering up to 12 free access days is removed, as is the limit on free access days only applying to state parks.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill required, when practicable, the Commission to pair free state park entry days with local community events and required the Commission to consult with interested local parks and recreation directors when establishing free state park entry days to help identify planned local community events.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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) Maximizing the value of free access days is a way to improve the Discover Pass program. It would allow more people to visit state parks and enjoy the resource, leading to more Discover Pass sales as visitors, who had the opportunity to enjoy a park, will come back on days that are not free access days. This increased interest in state parks will lead to more revenue.

It would not be a burden on the administration of state parks to coordinate with local community leaders. Many community events have low attendance because people don't want to have to buy a Discover Pass just to attend the event. To avoid this, event organizers have to spend money to guarantee that each attendee has their access cost covered by the event organizer.

The Commission is not a for profit organization. The Commission can be a better local community partner if local rangers are empowered to work in their communities to find the best free access days.

(With concerns) The Discover Pass is the principal financing tool for the Commission. Maximizing revenue from Discover Pass sales is the best way to keep state parks open so that they can be enjoyed. Any increase in free access will lead to a decrease in revenue and will not make the Discover Pass a better product. Tying free access days to specific local events would have administrative complications.

The Discover Pass is one of the nation's most successful access passes, and the Commission is undertaking a new product and marketing changes to make it even more successful. Any changes to the program, especially one that adds administrative complications, would take effort and energy away from the ongoing efforts to strengthen the product.

The state parks system is a gem for the people of Washington. However, it is not being fully funded as it is.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Klippert, prime sponsor; and John H. Trumbo, City of Kennewick.

(With concerns) Daniel Farber and Katie Manning, State Parks and Recreation Commission; and Alia Griffing, Washington Federation of State Employees.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.