

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5166

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the management of forage fish resources.

Brief Description: Concerning the management of forage fish resources.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Rolfes, Ranker and Hasegawa).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 3/12/15, 3/17/15 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by Committee)**

- Commissions two studies regarding the populations in Puget Sound of smelt and other forage fish.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Lytton, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Dunshee, Hurst, Kretz, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Schmick, Stanford and Van De Wege.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

According to the forage fish management plan developed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), forage fish are small, schooling fish which serve as a food source for other fish species, birds, and marine mammals. Examples of forage fish species are herring, smelt, anchovy, and sardine.

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.

There are both commercial and recreational fisheries that target forage fish. Although most recreational fishing in Washington requires a license from the WDFW, including recreational fishing for most forage fish, there is an exemption for smelt. A recreational fisher may catch smelt without a license.

A person must obtain approval from the WDFW prior to commencing any construction project that will use, divert, obstruct, or change the natural flow or bed of any of the salt or fresh waters of the state. Hydraulic project approvals are issued by the WDFW to ensure the proper protection of fish life and may be denied or conditioned on beaches where forage fish spawning has been documented.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Two studies are commissioned to be completed by the WDFW. The first study requires the WDFW to collaborate with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to survey the locations of surf smelt and sand lance spawning areas throughout the Puget Sound. This study, which may employ the Veterans Conservation Corps, must be used by the WDFW and the DNR to expand knowledge of documented spawning habitat areas in the Puget Sound.

The second study requires the WDFW to conduct a mid-water trawl at various depths throughout the Puget Sound to evaluate the prevalence of adult forage fish. The results of this study must be integrated into the existing Puget Sound ecosystem assessments.

Both surveys must be completed by June 30, 2017, and are subject to the availability of amounts specifically appropriated.

The Legislature intends for the DNR and the WDFW to complete the spawning grounds survey with funds specifically appropriated from the state's Capital Budget for the 2015-17 biennium.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The striking amendment provides legislative intent for the DNR and the WDFW to complete the spawning grounds survey with funds specifically appropriated from the state's Capital Budget for the 2015-17 biennium and adds an expiration date.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended 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) The WDFW has identified these two studies as two of the most important things that can be done to promote the sustainable management of forage fish. There are information gaps, and without filling them, the state cannot be assured of sound forage fish management. The studies in the bill are two-year studies that build upon work that has already begun. Funding the studies in the budget will be important.

Puget Sound beaches have experienced a loss of marine diversity. When animals lower on the food chain suffer, it affects all of the animals above them on the food chain, including marine birds. The Puget Sound Partnership's Action Agenda has identified the protection and restoration of the marine nearshore ecosystem as critical, and forage fish are the backbone of that ecosystem.

Filling the knowledge gaps through these studies will support recreational and commercial fishing and lead to a Puget Sound with more salmon and less jellyfish.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Rolfes, prime sponsor; Bruce Hoeft; Bruce Wishart, Sound Action; Phillip Dionne, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Jeff Parsons, Puget Sound Partnership; and Trina Bayard, Audubon Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.