

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESSB 5843

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Environment

**Title:** An act relating to outdoor recreation.

**Brief Description:** Concerning outdoor recreation.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Ranker, Parlette, Pearson, Rolfes, Hewitt, Litzow, Conway, Hasegawa and McAuliffe).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Environment: 3/23/15, 3/30/15 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill**

- Provides the additional consideration of programs that utilize veterans for at least 50 percent of their program implementation or administration for the Director of the State Parks and Recreation Commission to consider when awarding grants from the Outdoor Education and Recreation grant program.
- Requires the Governor to, subject to funding, appoint and maintain a senior policy advisor on outdoor recreation with a focus on promoting and increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation in Washington.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Fitzgibbon, Chair; Peterson, Vice Chair; Farrell, Goodman, Harris and McBride.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Shea, Ranking Minority Member; Short, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Pike and Taylor.

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

**Background:**

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*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 State Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) is responsible for implementing the Outdoor Education and Recreation (OER) grant program, which is funded from the OER Account. This grant program is unofficially known as the "No Child Left Inside" program. The OER grant program is designed to provide opportunities for public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, after-school programs, and community-based programs that provide outdoor education opportunities to schools that are fully aligned with the state's essential academic learning requirements.

In implementing the OER grant program, the Director of the Commission must set priorities and develop criteria for grant awards. The Director of the Commission must consider a number of factors when doing this, including the contribution to the reduction of academic failure and dropout rates, the use of research-based curriculum, contributions to healthy life styles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition, the use of state parks as venues, the maximization of the number of participants that can be served, a commitment to matching and in-kind resources, the creation of partnerships with private entities, opportunities for students to directly experience and understand nature, and the inclusion of ongoing program evaluation, assessment, and reporting of their effectiveness.

The Commission only makes grants from the OER grant program when the Legislature appropriates funds to do so. Grants have not been made from the OER grant program since the year 2008.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The consideration of programs that utilize veterans for at least 50 percent of their program implementation or administration is added to the list of considerations for the Director of the Commission to consider when awarding grants from the OER grant program.

The Governor is required to, subject to funding, appoint and maintain a senior policy advisor on outdoor recreation. The policy advisor must focus on promoting and increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation in Washington. A particular focus must be given to achieving economic development and job growth through outdoor recreation. The appointed senior policy advisor must be confirmed by the state Senate.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) A recent study has concluded that outdoor recreation, as an industry, generates billions of dollars in economic activity in Washington and creates thousands of jobs. The state has the opportunity to harvest the benefits of outdoor recreation; benefits that are enjoyed statewide and that give Washington a competitive business advantage in recruiting and maintaining businesses and talented employees, including high demand medical professionals. The benefits of outdoor recreation lead to more jobs, improved public health, and the fostering of environmental stewardship values.

At the same time as the study, the Governor convened a Blue Ribbon Panel on outdoor recreation that identified as its number one recommendation the creation of a position in state government to serve as a point person to harness the economic development power of the state's outdoor recreation industry. Having the position serve in the Office of the Governor allows that person to be the voice of outdoor recreation and to work above the various agencies to build partnerships, identify opportunities, and develop incentives to increase the economic impact of outdoor recreation. It also positions the state to create a unity of effort across the state in linking outdoor recreation economic opportunities with the military and veteran community. This is a model used by other states to achieve great success. The Senate confirmation of the position guarantees that it will be a person who both parties can agree on and who will take the responsibilities seriously.

The OER grant program is important to get kids outside to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation. The grants help combat the physical and mental health issues faced by children that have over 50 hours a week dedicated to looking at the various electric screens. The OER program can create the first opportunities for a city kid to get outside, but also has a statewide application that is beneficial to suburban and rural children as well.

The OER program has proved successful, but needs to be funded beyond the one biennium when it received an appropriation. The public investment will be matched by contributions, creating a program with a scope not reachable with mere contributions alone.

The outdoors is important to military and veteran families as outdoor recreation can be an important aspect of therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other disorders facing veterans. Giving veteran programs a priority in the OER grant program will help families most at risk of economic disruption due to military service and can help connect military families and their children with programs designed to assist them.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Ranker, prime sponsor; Senator Parlette; Doug Levy, Washington Recreation and Park Association; Ben Klasky, Islandwood; Kristen Ragain, Recreational Equipment Incorporated; Becca Polgase, Mountaineers; Joshua Brandon, Project Rebirth; Scott Richards, Nature Conservancy; and Daniel Farber, State Parks and Recreation Commission.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.