

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1654

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, March 25, 2015

Title: An act relating to controlling noxious weeds while still supporting pollen-rich forage plant communities for honey bees.

Brief Description: Controlling noxious weeds while still supporting pollen-rich forage plant communities for honey bees.

Sponsors: House Committee on General Government & Information Technology (originally sponsored by Representatives Peterson, Lytton, Fitzgibbon, Blake and Walkinshaw).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/15, 67-31.

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 3/18/15, 3/25/15 [DP-WM, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Hatfield, Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Hewitt, McAuliffe and Warnick.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Dansel, Vice Chair.

Staff: Bonnie Kim (786-7316)

Background: Noxious Weeds. Noxious weeds are plants that are highly destructive, competitive, or difficult to control. The State Noxious Weed Control Board (Weed Board) maintains an active list of noxious weeds present in Washington. The Weed Board must adopt a statewide noxious weed list at least once yearly after a public hearing. Once the state noxious weed list is adopted, county weed boards must select from the identified weeds for inclusion on a local noxious weed list.

Landowners are responsible for either eradicating or controlling the spread of noxious weeds identified in their local county list. County weed boards are responsible for enforcement. All state agencies must control noxious weeds on lands they manage in cooperation with county weed control boards.

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.

Honey Bees. The 2013 Legislature directed the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to convene a workgroup to address challenges facing the honey bee industry and to develop a report outlining solutions that bolster the use of Washington honey bees to pollinate tree fruits, berries, and seeds. WSDA delivered the required report on December 12, 2014, identifying bee forage and nutrition as main issues affecting honey bee health. The report concluded that access to diverse pollen and nectar sources, provided through access to diverse forage habitat, is essential for honey bees to meet their protein, carbohydrate, and other nutritional needs. The report cited the loss of forage to weed control as one of the challenges facing honey bees in their search for adequately diverse forage. Twenty-seven of the 142 plants presently listed as noxious weeds are identified in the report as plants that provide valuable bee forage.

Summary of Bill: Pilot Project. The Weed Board must conduct a pilot project that evaluates the advantages of replacing pollen-rich noxious weeds with native forage plants that can produce similar levels of pollen and nectar to support honeybee populations. The Weed Board must seek to maximize the dual public benefits of reducing noxious weeds and maintaining access to pollen forage for honey bees and apiarists. The Weed Board must coordinate with state or federal public land managers to provide plant starts, seed packs, and other goods or services necessary to replace noxious weeds with native plants or non-native plants that are not invasive.

The Weed Board must report the findings from the pilot project to the Legislature by October 31, 2016. The report must include the description of appropriate tools for replacing noxious weeds with pollen-rich forage plants, an assessment scale rating the usefulness of the tools, and any other recommendations for extending the pilot project or implementing the lessons learned through the pilot project.

State Land Management. As part of the mandate for state agencies to control noxious weeds on the land they manage, state agencies must, when conducting planned projects, give preference to replacing pollen-rich and nectar-rich noxious weeds with native pollinator-friendly forage plants when deemed appropriate by the agency and its targeted resource management goals.

Corps Projects. When appropriate, corps project to remove noxious weeds must include planting pollen and nectar-rich native plants.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: It is important that we support the honey bee product industry. This bill will help support the agriculture industry throughout the state. This bill is a nice complement to our efforts to educate the public about noxious weeds and support the idea of replacing the weeds with native plants. I hope this pilot project will allow

us to educate beekeepers on how to increase bee-friendly forage by planting the best plants for that purpose. Native plants are often ceremonial and medicinal. This bill will allow for more native plants in both urban and rural areas.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Peterson, prime sponsor; Mike Moran, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation; Alison Halpern, State Noxious Weed Control Board; Tim Hiatt, WA State Beekeepers Assn.

Persons Signed in to Testify But Not Testifying: No one.