

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1676

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, March 25, 2015
Ways & Means, April 7, 2015

Title: An act relating to understanding the effects of predation on wild ungulate populations.

Brief Description: Understanding the effects of predation on wild ungulate populations.

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

Brief History: Passed House: 3/10/15, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 3/18/15, 3/25/15 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 4/06/15, 4/07/15 [DP, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

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

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

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Hill, Chair; Braun, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Hargrove, Ranking Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Member on the Capital Budget; Ranker, Ranking Minority Member, Operating; Bailey, Becker, Billig, Brown, Conway, Fraser, Hasegawa, Hatfield, Hewitt, Kohl-Welles, O'Ban, Padden, Rolfes and Warnick.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Schoesler.

Staff: Sherry McNamara (786-7402)

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: Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) Generally. DFW serves as manager of the state's fish and wildlife resources. Among other duties, DFW must protect and manage fish and wildlife, including establishing the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife.

Wild Ungulate Management in Washington State. In general, wild ungulates are any wild species of hoofed mammal, including deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and caribou. Many species of ungulate are also classified as big game for purposes of licensing and criminal penalties.

In conducting game management, DFW identifies its overall goals as to:

- protect, sustain, and manage hunted wildlife;
- provide stable, regulated recreational hunting opportunity to all citizens;
- protect and enhance wildlife habitat; and
- minimize adverse impacts to residents, other wildlife, and the environment.

Wolf Management in Washington State. Gray wolves are currently endangered under federal law in approximately the western two-thirds of the state, with the species having been federally delisted in the eastern one-third in 2011. Wolves are classified under state law as an endangered species throughout the state.

The wolf conservation and management plan (wolf plan) was adopted in December 2011. Its stated goals are to:

- restore the wolf population to a self-sustaining size and geographic distribution;
- manage wolf-livestock conflicts to minimize livestock losses while not negatively impacting recovery;
- maintain healthy ungulate populations; and
- develop public understanding of the conservation and management needs of wolves.

Specific to ungulates, the wolf plan identifies a series of objectives, strategies, and tasks including monitoring ungulate populations in areas occupied by wolves; enhancing ungulate populations; managing hunting to ensure sufficient prey for wolves; reducing ungulate poaching; managing wolf-ungulate conflicts; and integrating the management of ungulates and wolves on an ecological basis.

University of Washington (UW) Predator Ecology Lab. UW's Predator Ecology Lab (lab) is administratively located within the Wildlife Sciences program, which in turn is part of the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences. The lab conducts research relating to predators, their impact on prey, and large carnivore conservation and management.

Summary of Bill: UW, through the lab, must conduct a four-year study on the health of the state's wildlife ungulate population in areas with a change in predator-prey dynamics due to wolf recovery. Specifically, the study's stated goal is to assess whether the wild ungulate population is adequate to support the change in predatory pressure.

The study must be independent, scientific, blind, and peer reviewed. At minimum UW must compare trends in at least four game management units, at least two with wolves present and two without.

Administrative aspects of the study are specified to include the following:

- a limitation on UW retaining more than 15 percent of study funding for administrative overhead;
- direction that UW provide regulator updates to the DFW wolf advisory group;
- a due date for an interim report from UW to the Legislature by October 21, 2016, and a final report by October 31, 2018; and
- a requirement that DFW report any changes to ungulate or predator management informed by the study results by January 2, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. Includes a null and void clause if specific funding is not provided.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Natural Resources & Parks): PRO: This bill will establish a study that will promote the wolf-ungulate portion of the state's wolf plan. UW has already started this work, and this bill will provide direction and resources to expand the project. Landowners have observed increased predation as ungulate populations decline in areas with wolves. Ungulates are an important state resource, including providing food and being part of the custom and culture of many communities.

Persons Testifying (Natural Resources & Parks): PRO: Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner; Karen Skoog, Pend Oreille County Commissioner; Jack Field, WA Cattlemen's Assn.; Dave Ware, DFW.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This four-year study by UW is an independent assessment of the predator-prey dynamics related to the gray wolf recovery. The study will also include original research by UW. DFW supports this study, particularly from the standpoint that the wild ungulates are a primary prey for the gray wolf.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Dave Ware, DFW.

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