

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6199

As of January 22, 2016

Title: An act relating to providing for legislative review of the updated North Cascade elk herd plan.

Brief Description: Providing for legislative review of the updated North Cascade elk herd plan.

Sponsors: Senators Pearson, Chase, Roach, Bailey and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/21/16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

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.

Game Management Planning. According to the current Game Management Plan for 2015 through 2021, DFW has developed or is updating management plans for each of the 10 elk herds in the state.

Statewide management goals for elk are:

- preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage elk and their habitat to ensure sustainable populations;
- manage elk for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes; and
- manage elk populations for a sustainable annual harvest.

North Cascades Elk Herd Plan Development. DFW is currently in the process of updating the management plan for the North Cascades elk herd, also known as the Nooksack elk herd, which resides in portions of Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, and King counties. The draft plan includes goals for:

- population, population monitoring, and harvest management;
- hunter access;
- public safety; and

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- elk-human conflicts.

Summary of Bill: Once completed, DFW must provide one full regular session for legislative review before the updated North Cascades elk herd plan takes effect.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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: The North Cascades elk herd has created significant challenges for agriculture, and the plan to increase the numbers cause concern. In addition to agricultural damage, there are also issues around public safety and hoof disease. The concerns raised by farmers in the area at the time elk were translocated have proven to be true. Damage claims are difficult to pursue for a working farmer. This should be a wake up call for DFW.

OTHER: There is support for the bill but concerns about the proposed management plan. The agency recognizes the many elk-related issues with the herd, and has undertaken outreach efforts in plan development. The agency realizes the plan development process has not always been ideal, and will continue to work with the stakeholders and legislators on plan completion.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Tom Davis, WA Farm Bureau; Randy Good, Friend of Skagit County; Jack Field; Gary Knaus, citizen; Mike Ware, citizen; Jim Hinton, Washington Cattlemen.

OTHER: Cindy Alia, Citizens alliance for property rights; Mick Cope, Game Division Manager - WDFW.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.