

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2175

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

**Title:** An act relating to natural resource management activities.

**Brief Description:** Concerning natural resource management activities.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Maycumber, Blake, Buys, Taylor and Shea.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/9/18, 1/23/18 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Authorizes the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) to use the best available land management techniques to manage acquired lands.
- Allows the Department to use specific land management techniques without preparing an environmental impact statement.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Chapman, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fitzgibbon, Lytton, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Robinson, Schmick, Springer, Stanford and Walsh.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Chandler and Kretz.

**Staff:** Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

**Background:**

Land Management by the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

As a part of its mandate to protect and preserve the state's fish and wildlife resources while providing sustainable recreational and commercial opportunities, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) may acquire and manage state lands. The Department currently owns

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or manages about 1 million acres in 33 wildlife areas, along with 700 public water-access sites.

State Environmental Policy Act.

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) establishes a review process for state and local governments to evaluate environmental impacts from project permits and other government decisions. The SEPA process involves the completion of an environmental checklist by a lead agency and coordination with other governments and agencies as applicable. Some projects may require the preparation of an environmental impact statement. Information collected during the SEPA process may be used to adjust project proposals to reduce potential environmental impacts. Certain actions are exempt from the SEPA requirements to submit an environmental checklist or to prepare an environmental impact statement.

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**Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The Department may manage its acquired lands using the best available land management techniques. The following techniques are exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact study under the SEPA:

- licenses or approvals to move firewood or for brush picking;
- periodic use application of Department of Agriculture-approved chemicals by licensed personnel;
- issuance of right-of-way easements and use permits to use existing roads in nonresidential areas; and
- issuance of grazing leases covering 640 acres or less.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill specifies that best available land management practices may be used by the Department to reduce hazard fuel loads in areas that could be prone to wildfire. The language related to grazing leases is changed to allow the issuance of grazing leases covering 640 acres or less to reduce hazard fuel loads. Management activities that are exempt from the requirement to complete an environmental impact statement are as follows:

Issuance or reissuance of grazing leases covering 640 contiguous acres or less;

- licenses or approvals to remove firewood;
  - issuance of leases for brush picking;
  - periodic use of chemical or mechanical means; and
  - issuance of rights-of-way, easements, and use permits to use existing roads in nonresidential areas.
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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date of Substitute 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) This bill gives the Department additional authority to use best land management practices to quickly and effectively reduce fuel loads. For example, during a dry season when the fuel load is high, goats may be introduced to reduce fuels. Recent years have brought catastrophic, high-temperature wildfires that have resulted in damage to millions of acres of state land, and soil erosion and acidity. It is important to be proactive in protection state lands, and this bill is a step in the right direction. The Department has used prescribed burning to reduce fuel loads. When fuel loads are reduced, fire temperatures are reduced, potentially saving habitat. The Department appreciates efforts to manage lands to address forest health and reduce the risks and protect fish and wildlife resources. The bill moves current exemptions from rule into statute. The Department is working with the sponsor on language regarding the use of grazing to reduce fuel loads.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There is concern about the SEPA exemption language. Futurewise is working with the prime sponsor to address the concerns.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Maycumber, prime sponsor; and Paul Dahmer, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(Other) Bryce Yadon, Futurewise.

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