

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 2175

As Passed House:
February 12, 2018

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].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/18, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed 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.

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.

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.

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 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.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The Department may manage its acquired lands using the best available land management techniques. These techniques include:

- 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 regardless of whether the land has been actively grazed.

Land management activities under this authority are exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact study under the SEPA, and has a duty to develop mitigation actions where appropriate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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) 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.