

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2276

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to notification of wildlife transfer, relocation, or introduction into a new location.

Brief Description: Concerning notification of wildlife transfer, relocation, or introduction into a new location.

Sponsors: Representatives Eslick, Haler and Young.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/11/18, 1/23/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to hold a public hearing before relocating or introducing certain species of wildlife into a new location for the purpose of population maintenance or enhancement.
- Requires the WDFW to provide 30 days public notice in advance of a public meeting on a wildlife relocation, transfer, or introduction.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Chapman, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Fitzgibbon, Kretz, Lytton, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Robinson, Schmick, Springer, Stanford and Walsh.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

Department of Fish and Wildlife Wildlife Management.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has been delegated the responsibility to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage Washington's wildlife, food fish, game fish, and

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shellfish resources. As a part of this responsibility, the WDFW may regulate the transportation and possession of fish and wildlife in the state, and authorize the removal, relocation, or introduction of wildlife when it is necessary for wildlife management or research. The WDFW sometimes has a role both in wildlife removal, relocation, or introduction decisions, and in implementing such decisions.

Definition of Big Game.

Big game is defined in statute and includes elk, deer, moose, mountain goat, caribou, mountain sheep, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion and cougars, and black and grizzly bears.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must hold a public hearing before WDFW personnel may relocate or introduce big game animals, or wolves, lynx, bobcats, or coyotes into a new location in the state for the purposes of population maintenance or enhancement.

The meeting must occur in the community most likely to be impacted by the relocation. The presiding official or WDFW staff must present the details of the WDFW's proposed action, and the public must be afforded the opportunity to comment. Written or electronic comments may be included in the hearing record.

Public notice of the meeting must be provided at least 30 days prior to the date of the meeting and must state the date, time, and location of the public hearing and a summary of the proposed action. The summary must include:

- the species of wildlife to be introduced, transferred, or relocated;
- the estimated number of animals;
- the general location where the wildlife will be released; and
- the potential range where the wildlife is likely to roam.

A press release of the hearing notice must be provided to media outlets in the communities most likely to be impacted, posted on the WDFW's website, posted on the website of the community or local government near where the wildlife will be introduced or relocated, and provided in writing to members of local legislative and executive bodies of any location impacted by the wildlife relocation or introduction.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill specifies that the public meeting and 30-day notice requirement applies to relocation or introduction of wolves, coyotes, lynx, bobcats, and animals defined in statute as "big game," where the action is intended for population maintenance or enhancement. Exemptions for activities occurring at existing hatcheries; beaver relocation; and removal of an animal from an urban or residential area are removed.

The substitute bill makes a variety of changes to how the public meeting must be conducted. The public hearing must be held in the community most likely to be impacted by the action.

The substitute bill removes the direction that no member of the public may be required to register his or her name as a condition of attendance; the requirement for an oral and visual presentation to be provided; and the direction that comments must be presented individually in the presence of other attendees.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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) The idea for this bill came from the recent mountain goat relocation proposal. There is a need for a more robust public process before wildlife introductions take place. It is important for local communities likely to be impacted by wildlife relocations, as well as their elected officials, to be notified of any potential wildlife relocations. There is concern about the health and safety of livestock and recreationists. A previous relocation of elk from the Mount St. Helens area resulted in several years of conflict. The elk have become a nuisance to private property, and the potential for elk hoof disease is a threat to livestock health. An increase in elk populations is leading to an increase in elk hoof disease risk. Land that is zoned for agriculture should be used for agriculture, not wildlife rehabilitation. It is important for everyone to be prepared for wildlife encounters by knowing what kind of wildlife is in the forest. The requirement that individuals have the opportunity to provide comment in the presence and hearing of other attendees is an important aspect of the bill. There should be an amendment to require a meeting to be held in any community likely to be impacted by introduction of wildlife.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is committed to transparency with regard to wildlife management actions. The WDFW is concerned with the broad scope of the bill as written. For example, activities such as the WDFW's pheasant release program and some routine wildlife management activities would fall under the public meeting and notice requirement in the bill. The WDFW is working with the sponsor on some clarifying language to provide further specificity.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Eslick, prime sponsor; Randy Good, Friends of Skagit County, Skagit County Cattlemen's Association, and Citizen's Alliance for Property Rights; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau and Washington Cattlemen's Association; and Ted Jackson.

(Other) Eric Gardner, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.