
**Rural Development, Agriculture &
Natural Resources Committee**

HB 2027

Brief Description: Concerning the governance structure of the department of fish and wildlife.

Sponsors: Representatives Fitzgibbon, Chapman and Tharinger.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a task force to study the governance of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) and the statutory mandate of the Department and the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Hearing Date: 1/26/22

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is composed of nine members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Each even-numbered year, three commissioners are appointed for six-year terms. Three members of the Commission must reside in Eastern Washington, three in Western Washington, and the remaining three members are appointed at-large. No two members may reside in the same county. If a vacancy occurs on the Commission before the end of the Commissioner's term, the Governor must appoint a successor within 60 days to complete the term.

The Commission operates under a statutory mandate to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage Washington's wildlife, food fish, game fish, and shellfish. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has been delegated the responsibility to carry out this mandate at the direction of the Commission. The Commission and the Department each have specified duties and

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authorities under the mandate:

- The Commission may authorize the taking of fish and wildlife at times, in places, or in manners or quantities that in the judgment of the Commission do not impair the resources. The Commission must also attempt to maximize the public recreational fishing and hunting opportunities for all citizens.
- The Department must seek to maintain the economic well-being and stability of the fishing industry in the state, promote orderly fisheries, and enhance and improve recreational and commercial fishing in the state. Additionally, the Department must work cooperatively with volunteer groups and individuals to achieve the goals of the various fish and wildlife statutes to the greatest extent possible.

Summary of Bill:

A joint legislative task force on the governance of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (task force) is created. The task force is charged with reviewing options to restructure or eliminate the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission), recommending options for a new governance structure of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department), and reviewing the statutory mandate of both the Department and the Commission. The task force must report its findings to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2022.

The task force is comprised of one legislator from each of the largest caucuses of the House of Representatives and the Senate. In addition, the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives must jointly appoint one member each from the following groups:

- hunters;
- commercial fishers;
- recreational fishers;
- the outdoor recreation industry;
- an organization focused on wildlife conservation;
- an organization focused on land conservation;
- an organization focused on fisheries conservation;
- the agricultural business community;
- the business community;
- county government; and
- city government.

The Governor must appoint one member representing the Department, one member representing the Office of the Governor, and one current or former member of the Commission to the task force. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, and the Governor must jointly invite two members from federally recognized tribes with treaty reserved rights in Washington to participate in the task force.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2022.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.