

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5656

As of January 25, 2022

Title: An act relating to fish and wildlife commission members.

Brief Description: Concerning fish and wildlife commission members.

Sponsors: Senators Salomon, Van De Wege and Wilson, L..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/25/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Governor to provide a new appointment to the Fish and Wildlife Commission if the appointment is not confirmed by the Senate within 12 months.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the DFW director, and the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) are authorized to regulate state fish and wildlife resources and to issue licenses for fishing and hunting activities. DFW also manages nearly 1 million acres of public land for fish and wildlife, habitat conservation, and wildlife-oriented recreation.

Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Commission consists of nine members serving six-year terms. Members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Three members must reside east of the summit of the Cascade mountains, three must reside west of the summit, and the remaining three are at large, and may reside anywhere in the state. No two members may be residents of the same county. If a vacancy

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occurs on the Commission prior to the expiration of a term, the Governor must appoint a registered voter within 60 days to complete the term.

Persons eligible for appointment as members of the Commission must have general knowledge of the habits and distribution of fish and wildlife and must not hold another state, county, or municipal elective or appointive office. In making appointments to the Commission, the Governor must seek to maintain a balance reflecting all aspects of fish and wildlife, including representation recommended by sport fishers, commercial fishers, hunters, private landowners, and environmentalists.

The Legislature provided the Commission with broad policy and rulemaking authority for DFW. Among other duties, the Commission also classifies wildlife and establishes the basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner, and methods used for fishing and hunting activities. The Commission has the authority to appoint the DFW Director.

Summary of Bill: If the Senate does not confirm an appointment to the Fish and Wildlife Commission within 12 months, the appointment to the Commission expires and the Governor must provide a new appointment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is a policy making body that hires and fires the Director of the DFW and yet is not elected and accountable. While the Senate has the ability to approve or reject a commissioner, it is unlikely for an appointee to be rejected. With the ability to not approve an appointee, the Senate could have more input over Commission appointments. There is a lack of accountability in the Commission that needs to be addressed. The current Commission is dysfunctional and the status quo is unacceptable. Their current process is not what was intended when the public passed the initiative years ago to establish the Commission. One option may be to convene a task force to evaluate and make recommendations for a new governance structure. There needs to be a larger discussion to address the current turmoil.

CON: While it has taken too long to fill vacant appointments, and that can be frustrating, there recently were three appointments made to the Commission. Hopefully in the future there will not be delays in filling vacancies on the Commission.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Jesse Salomon, Prime Sponsor; Nello Picinich, Coastal

Conservation Association; Carl Burke, NW Marine Trade Assoc and NW Sportsfishing Assoc.

CON: Samantha Bruegger, Washington Wildlife First.

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