

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5661

As of January 25, 2022

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

Brief Description: Concerning the appointment of fish and wildlife commission members.

Sponsors: Senators Honeyford, Van De Wege, Wagoner and Wilson, L..

Brief History:

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

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes that no Fish and Wildlife Commissioner may serve without reappointment or replacement.
- Requires the chair of each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate and the House of Representatives to appoint a registered voter to the Fish and Wildlife Commission within 60 days to complete the term if the Governor fails to fill the vacancy within 60 days.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (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 occurs on the Commission prior to the expiration of a term, the Governor must appoint a registered voter within 60

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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 the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). Among other duties, the Commission has the authority to appoint the DFW director.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. DFW, the DFW director, and the 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.

Summary of Bill: No Commissioner may serve without reappointment or replacement and the reappointment or replacement must occur prior to the end of the next legislative session. If the Governor fails to fill a vacancy on the Commission within 60 days, the chair of each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate and the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives must appoint a registered voter within 60 days to complete the term.

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: Folks in eastern Washington have felt like the Governor has ignored making an appointment of a person from eastern Washington. Eastern Washington has been without representation and there has not been a full Commission for some time. There is frustration that it took the Governor more than a year to fill some of the vacant commission posts. There is a need to increase accountability and transparency at DFW and the process for managing our state's fish and wildlife can be improved. This bill offers specific solutions to specific problems.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Jim Honeyford, Prime Sponsor; Samantha Bruegger, Washington Wildlife First; Nello Picinich, Coastal Conservation Association.

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