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**Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Committee**

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**HB 1849**

**Brief Description:** Concerning the establishment of a statewide elk management program.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Lekanoff, Dent, Eslick and Low.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife to establish a statewide elk management program for the purposes of reducing elk-vehicle collisions on highways, reducing elk damage to private crop lands and properties, and improving and supporting the health of elk herds.

**Hearing Date:** 3/29/23

**Staff:** Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

**Background:**

Game Management Plans.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) maintains, and regularly updates, a game management plan for the various game species in Washington. The purpose of the plan, according to the WDFW, is to guide the WDFW in the management of hunted wildlife in six-year time frames. The declared focus of the plan is the scientific management of game populations, harvest management, and other significant factors affecting game populations. The overall goals of game management plans are: protecting, sustaining, and managing hunted wildlife; providing stable, regulated recreational hunting opportunities; protecting and enhancing wildlife habitat; and minimizing adverse impacts to residents, other wildlife, and the environment.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

### Colockum Herd Elk Management Pilot Project.

Through legislation enacted in 2017 the WDFW was directed to conduct an elk management pilot project within the range of the Colockum elk herd to evaluate wildlife management actions to reduce elk highway collisions and to reduce elk damage to crops. As part of the pilot project, the WDFW was directed to work with the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to evaluate wildlife management actions to reduce elk highway collisions.

The pilot project was required to include direct wildlife management efforts, including:

- the increased use of special depredation hunts and general hunting opportunities of the Colockum herd;
- a prohibition on the feeding of elk within the pilot project area by persons other than WDFW personnel; and
- the use of managed livestock grazing to attract elk away from roads and private property.

The WDFW and the WSDOT were required to report the results of the pilot project to the Legislature by October 31, 2020. The report was required to address how the information gained from the pilot project would be used to manage the Colockum herd and other similarly situated elk herds.

The statutory authorization for the Colockum herd elk management pilot project expired July 1, 2021.

### **Summary of Bill:**

#### Statewide Elk Management Program.

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must work with tribal comanagers to establish a statewide elk management program based on the Colockum herd elk management pilot project. The purposes of the elk management program are to reduce elk-vehicle collisions on highways, to reduce elk damage to private crop lands and properties, and to improve and support the health of elk herds.

The WDFW and the comanagers must invite affected federally recognized Indian tribes, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Department of Agriculture (WSDA), local governments, agricultural producers, and hunting groups to participate in all aspects of the elk management program.

The WDFW must work with the WSDOT to reduce elk-vehicle collisions on highways, initially focusing on reducing traffic collisions along highways within the range of the herds. The WDFW and the WSDOT must implement locally appropriate methods of keeping animals off roadways including, but not limited to, new fencing techniques, lights, signage, and other techniques. In addition, the departments shall scope wildlife corridors and safe crossing locations.

#### Statewide Elk Management Program—Direct Wildlife Management Efforts.

The WDFW must engage in direct wildlife management efforts in the elk management program. As part of these direct efforts, the WDFW must:

- adopt the use of special depredation hunts, general hunting opportunities, tribal hunting opportunities, and hunting opportunities for youth and persons with disabilities. Total hunting opportunities for any given elk herd under the elk management program must be set based on the carrying capacity of the land and water available to that herd and the health of the herd;
- work to reduce artificial feeding of elk by persons other than the WDFW;
- in conjunction with increased collaboration with local landowners, increase pressure on elk in agricultural areas through year-round deterrence, and monitor the effectiveness of the deterrence pressure;
- establish one or more locally appropriate compensation programs for impacts to managed pasture and fencing in partnership with the WSDA;
- explore increasing forage for elk on public lands and private lands away from agricultural areas, as well as the use of managed livestock grazing to attract elk away from roads, populated areas, and agricultural lands;
- scope translocation of elk to more suitable habitat within the range of the herd, provided the WDFW first determines that such a translocation does not pose a risk of disease transmission;
- employ a combined approach of all reasonable tools to move elk off agricultural and other lands; and
- identify locally appropriate locations for upland feeding, best access routes to uplands, and expected movement of elk, in order to minimize damage to agricultural land.

Statewide Elk Management Program—Report to Legislature.

The WDFW must provide a status report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature on the results of the elk management program by October 1, 2024, and by October 1st of every even-numbered year thereafter.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on March 24, 2023.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.