S-1326.1

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**SENATE BILL 5728**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Wagoner, Dozier, and Short

AN ACT Relating to fish and wildlife commission members; amending RCW 77.04.030, 43.06.092, 77.04.040, and 77.04.055; adding new sections to chapter 77.04 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that it is important for the proper management of the fish and wildlife of this state to have a fully qualified and confirmed fish and wildlife commission that supports science-based management and represents the broad interests of the state of Washington.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.04 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The governor, in consultation with the senate natural resources committee chair, must appoint a commission nominating committee and convene the first meeting of the commission nominating committee by January 2026. The commission nominating committee shall meet as necessary to recommend to the governor all potential commission members to be appointed, reappointed, and replaced on the commission. The governor may only appoint commission members recommended by the commission nominating committee. The commission nominating committee must represent broad interests related to science-based fish and wildlife management in the state of Washington, and appoint members as follows:

(a) Two members representing hunting organizations, with one representing big game and the other small game;

(b) One member representing a recreational angling organization;

(c) One member representing fishing guides or charters;

(d) One member representing hunting guides;

(e) One member representing the commercial fishing or aquaculture industry;

(f) One member representing the sport fishing industry;

(g) One member representing an environmental organization or one specializing in land and water conservation or management;

(h) One member from the agricultural sector;

(i) One member from the outdoor recreation business community;

(j) One member from a county or city government;

(k) One member representing a law enforcement agency; and

(l) Two members from a federally recognized Indian tribe with treaty reserved rights in the state of Washington, with one representing the east of the crest of the Cascades and one representing the west of the crest of the Cascades.

(2) At least five members must be based on the east of the Cascades and primarily focus their work on the east of the Cascades. Commission nominating committee members must serve staggered four-year terms, with unlimited renewals, and initial members must be split into two and four-year terms. At the initial meeting of the commission nominating committee, cochairs of the commission nominating committee must be selected by a majority vote of the commission nominating committee members, and serve two-year terms. Decisions of the committee shall be made with a two-thirds majority. Any vacancy must be filled within 90 days.

**Sec.**  RCW 77.04.030 and 2001 c 155 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The fish and wildlife commission consists of nine registered voters of the state. In January of each odd-numbered year, the governor shall appoint with the advice and consent of the senate three registered voters to the commission to serve for terms of six years from that January or until their successors are appointed and qualified. These nominations must originate from the commission nominating committee established in section 2 of this act. No commission member may serve on the commission without prior senate confirmation.

(2) If a vacancy occurs on the commission prior to the expiration of a term, the governor shall appoint a registered voter as recommended by the commission nominating committee established in section 2 of this act within ((~~sixty~~)) 60 days to complete the term. If the governor fails to fill the vacancy within 90 days, the commission nominating committee established in section 2 of this act must appoint the member. Three members shall be residents of that portion of the state lying east of the summit of the Cascade mountains, and three shall be residents of that portion of the state lying west of the summit of the Cascade mountains. Three additional members shall be appointed at large. No two members may be residents of the same county. The legal office of the commission is at the administrative office of the department in Olympia.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.06.092 and 1981 c 338 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) ((~~Any~~)) Except as provided in RCW 77.04.030, any gubernatorial appointee subject to senate confirmation shall continue to serve unless rejected by a vote of the senate. An appointee who is rejected by a vote of the senate shall not be reappointed to the same position for a period of one year from termination of service.

(2) Any person appointed by the governor to fill the unexpired term of an appointment subject to senate confirmation must also be confirmed by the senate.

**Sec.**  RCW 77.04.040 and 1995 1st sp.s. c 2 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Persons eligible for appointment as members of the commission ((~~shall have~~)) must:

(a) Support science-based management of game, nongame, and fish populations;

(b) Support recreational hunting and fishing as the preferred management tools for sustainable fish and wildlife populations;

(c) Have no current or prior conflict of interest in upholding the agency mission or mandates;

(d) Have general knowledge of the habits and distribution of fish and wildlife ((~~and shall not~~));

(e) Not hold another state, county, or municipal elective or appointive office, nor have a conflict of interest by receiving compensation, monetarily or otherwise, from any group, organization, association, or other entity for legal, lobbying, marketing, or other means that could reasonably bias a commissioner during rule-making proceedings; and

(f) Have purchased a valid hunting or fishing license in two of the most recent consecutive five years, unless they are members of a federally recognized Indian tribe.

(2) In making these appointments, the governor shall seek to maintain a balance reflecting all aspects of fish and wildlife, including representation recommended by organized groups representing sportfishers, commercial fishers, hunters, private landowners, and environmentalists. Persons eligible for appointment as fish and wildlife commissioners shall comply with the provisions of chapters 42.52 and ((~~42.17~~)) 42.56 RCW.

**Sec.**  RCW 77.04.055 and 2000 c 107 s 204 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) In establishing policies to preserve, protect, and perpetuate wildlife, fish, and wildlife and fish habitat, the commission shall meet annually with the governor to:

((~~(a)~~)) (i) Review and prescribe basic goals and objectives related to those policies; and

((~~(b)~~)) (ii) Review the performance of the department in implementing fish and wildlife policies.

(b) The commission ((~~shall~~)) members must follow the mandate of the department and commission as established under RCW 77.04.012, 77.04.020, and WAC 220-101-010, and maximize fishing, hunting, and outdoor recreational opportunities compatible with healthy and diverse fish and wildlife populations.

(2) The commission shall establish hunting, trapping, and fishing seasons and prescribe the time, place, manner, and methods that may be used to harvest or enjoy game fish and wildlife.

(3) The commission must demonstrate when setting hunting and fishing rules, regulations, and seasons, that they have made their decisions based on recommendations from the department and peer-reviewed science.

(4) The commission shall establish provisions regulating food fish and shellfish as provided in RCW 77.12.047.

((~~(4)~~)) (5) The commission shall have final approval authority for tribal, interstate, international, and any other department agreements relating to fish and wildlife.

((~~(5)~~)) (6) The commission shall adopt rules to implement the state's fish and wildlife laws.

((~~(6)~~)) (7) The commission shall have final approval authority for the department's budget proposals.

((~~(7)~~)) (8) The commission shall select its own staff and shall appoint the director of the department. The director and commission staff shall serve at the pleasure of the commission.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.04 RCW to read as follows:

If a commission member fails to fulfill the department and commission mandate under RCW 77.04.012 and 77.04.020 and WAC 220-101-010, does not perform the member's duties under RCW 77.04.055, or due to excessive absence or abandonment of the member's position, engages in any act of dishonesty, willful misconduct, or activity that reasonably appears as a conflict of interest, and the senate finds that adequate cause for removal exists, a vote must be initiated to remove the member from the member's commission position in a timely manner. The commission position is then vacant and must be filled as set forth in RCW 77.04.030 and section 2 of this act.

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