

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5165

As of January 20, 2025

Title: An act relating to compensation in frontier counties for deer and elk damage.

Brief Description: Concerning compensation in frontier counties for deer and elk damage.

Sponsors: Senators Short, Chapman, Dozier, Wagoner and Warnick.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/20/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Reserves 20 percent of the available funds for damage caused to commercial crops by wild deer and elk for claims arising from frontier counties.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Staff: Elena Becker (786-7493)

Background: Compensation for Damage Caused by Wild Deer and Elk. State law authorizes payments to the owners of commercial crops for damage caused by wild deer or elk. Owners of commercial crops are eligible for a claim when they grew, raised, or produced agricultural products with an estimated value of more than \$10,000 in the previous year, or are in their first year of agricultural production, and have made efforts to prevent the damage.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is statutorily authorized to adopt additional criteria for the type of damage qualifying for compensation. Among other things, the Commission's rules require that the loss be at least \$1,000 in value, that claimants have a valid damage prevention cooperative agreement with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and that a licensed crop insurance adjustor assess the damage.

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.

Frontier Counties. Under state law, frontier counties are those counties with fewer than 50 people per square mile. A frontier one county is a county with a population density of 21 people or fewer per square mile. A frontier two county is a county with a population density between 21 and 50 people per square mile.

As of 2024, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Ferry, Okanogan, Lincoln, Adams, Columbia, Garfield, Klickitat, Skamania, Jefferson, and Wahkiakum counties were designated frontier one counties.

As of 2024, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Pacific, Lewis, Chelan, Kittitas, Douglas, Grant, Walla Walla, Whitman, and Asotin counties were designated frontier two counties.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (Proposed Substitute): Twenty percent of the available funds for damage caused to commercial crops by wild deer and elk must be available for claims arising from frontier counties.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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 On Proposed Substitute: PRO: Deer and elk are increasingly present in valleys and farm fields. People are challenged by going through the appraisal process and then finding that funding isn't available.

Elk damage threatens the longevity of multigenerational small farms and ranches. Deer and elk damage haystacks, spring pastures, and more. This damage is significant, especially as herd sizes have increased from 30 to 150 head, and threatens the longevity of multigenerational small farms.

OTHER: Clarity is needed. What happens if there are insufficient claims from frontier counties to meet the 20 percent threshold? Is the frontier county designation based on the location of the business or the location of the crop?

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Shelly Short, Prime Sponsor; John Hudspeth.

OTHER: Mick Cope, WDFW.

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