

RCW 77.15.070 Civil forfeiture of property used for violation of chapter.

(1) Fish and wildlife officers and ex officio fish and wildlife officers may seize without warrant boats, airplanes, vehicles, motorized implements, conveyances, gear, appliances, or other articles they have probable cause to believe have been held with intent to violate or used in violation of this title or rule of the commission or director. However, fish and wildlife officers or ex officio fish and wildlife officers may not seize any item or article, other than for evidence, if under the circumstances, it is reasonable to conclude that the violation was inadvertent. The property seized is subject to forfeiture to the state under this section regardless of ownership. Property seized may be recovered by its owner by depositing with the department or into court a cash bond or equivalent security equal to the value of the seized property but not more than one hundred thousand dollars. Such cash bond or security is subject to forfeiture in lieu of the property. Forfeiture of property seized under this section is a civil forfeiture against property and is intended to be a remedial civil sanction.

(2) In the event of a seizure of property under this section, jurisdiction to begin the forfeiture proceedings shall commence upon seizure. Within fifteen days following the seizure, the seizing authority shall serve a written notice of intent to forfeit property on the owner of the property seized and on any person having any known right or interest in the property seized. Notice may be served by any method authorized by law or court rule, including service by certified mail with return receipt requested. Service by mail is deemed complete upon mailing within the fifteen-day period following the seizure.

(3) Persons claiming a right of ownership or right to possession of property are entitled to a hearing to contest forfeiture. Such a claim shall specify the claim of ownership or possession and shall be made in writing and served on the director within forty-five days of the seizure. If the seizing authority has complied with notice requirements and there is no claim made within forty-five days, then the property shall be forfeited to the state.

(4) If any person timely serves the director with a claim to property, the person shall be afforded an opportunity to be heard as to the person's claim or right. The hearing shall be before the director or director's designee, or before an administrative law judge appointed under chapter 34.12 RCW, except that a person asserting a claim or right may remove the matter to a court of competent jurisdiction if the aggregate value of the property seized is more than five thousand dollars. The department may settle a person's claim of ownership prior to the administrative hearing.

(5) The hearing to contest forfeiture and any subsequent appeal shall be as provided for in chapter 34.05 RCW, the administrative procedure act. The seizing authority has the burden to demonstrate that it had reason to believe the property was held with intent to violate or was used in violation of this title or rule of the commission or director. The person contesting forfeiture has the burden of production and proof by a preponderance of evidence that the person owns or has a right to possess the property and:

(a) That the property was not held with intent to violate or used in violation of this title; or

(b) If the property is a boat, airplane, or vehicle, that the illegal use or planned illegal use of the boat, airplane, or vehicle occurred without the owner's knowledge or consent, and that the owner

acted reasonably to prevent illegal uses of such boat, airplane, or vehicle.

(6) A forfeiture of a conveyance encumbered by a perfected security interest is subject to the interest of the secured party if the secured party neither had knowledge of nor consented to the act or omission. No security interest in seized property may be perfected after seizure.

(7) If seized property is forfeited under this section the department may retain it for official use unless the property is required to be destroyed, or upon application by any law enforcement agency of the state, release such property to the agency for the use of enforcing this title, or sell such property, and deposit the proceeds to the fish and wildlife enforcement reward account created in RCW 77.15.425. [2005 c 406 § 2; 2000 c 107 § 231; 1998 c 190 § 69.]