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**HOUSE BILL 1353**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Dent, Blake, Buys, and Hayes

AN ACT Relating to commissioning an elk management pilot project that focuses initially on the Colockum elk herd; adding a new section to chapter 77.36 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that the Colockum elk herd in central Washington is the fifth largest elk herd in the state and is currently managed for the state by the department of fish and wildlife.

(2) The legislature further finds that the Colockum elk herd has been the subject of a great deal of planning by the department of fish and wildlife. The herd is subject to an existing herd management plan that attempts to ensure a healthy, productive population, manage the herd for a variety of purposes, and allow for a sustainable yield within the population. Proper management of the Colockum elk herd is important, since the herd is a resource that provides significant recreational, aesthetic, cultural, and economic benefits to recreationalists, local communities, and native Americans.

(3) The legislature further finds that the department of fish and wildlife has studied the Colockum elk herd as recently as 2012. This study led to a greater understanding of the challenges facing the herd and resulted in recommendations as to management approaches to address those challenges.

(4) The legislature further finds that despite the active management and research by the department of fish and wildlife, there are still undesirable consequences of the Colockum elk herd's size, location, and behaviors. These consequences manifest as significant agricultural crop damage within the herd's range and unacceptably threatens to degrade highway safety levels on Interstate 90 and other roadways within the range of the herd due to collisions between herd members and vehicles.

(5) The legislature further finds that the unwanted consequences of the current Colockum elk herd management protocol are not isolated to the range of the Colockum herd. Other elk herds in the state are also the subject of similar management outcomes.

(6) The legislature further finds that the department of fish and wildlife should use the Colockum elk herd as the subject of a pilot project that explores the benefits of more active management. The pilot project should be limited in time and geography to ensure that overall herd health is not disrupted; however, it should be robust enough to offer scientifically rigorous results. Following the pilot project, the lessons learned should be applied to the Colockum elk herd management plan and to the management plans of any other relevant elk herds.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.36 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department must conduct an elk management pilot project to explore the viability of various wildlife management actions to reduce elk highway collisions and elk damage to private crop lands. The pilot project must initially focus on achieving a reduction in highway collisions on interstate highways, and crop damage on properties, within the range of the Colockum herd. However, the department may expand the pilot project to other herds in the state to establish a control group, test results replication, or maximize the benefits of the lessons learned through the pilot project.

(2) The department must work with the department of transportation to explore the viability of various wildlife management actions to reduce elk highway collisions, initially focusing on reducing traffic collisions along interstate highways within the range of the herd.

(3) Direct wildlife management efforts must be employed in the pilot project implemented under this section, including:

(a) Increased use of special deprivation hunts and general hunting opportunity within the Colockum herd. Total hunting depredations under the pilot project must be limited to three hundred elk per calendar year and these efforts must be designed and implemented in a manner that does not conflict with the primary goals of the current elk herd management plan for the Colockum herd;

(b) The establishment of a permitting mechanism to allow a person to feed elk by permit only; and

(c) The use of managed livestock grazing to attract elk away from roads and private property.

(4) Consistent with RCW 43.01.036, the department and the department of transportation must report the results of the pilot project to the appropriate committees of the legislature by October 31, 2020. Along with results, the departments must report on how the information gleaned from the pilot project will be used to manage the Colockum elk herd and other similarly situated elk herds in the state.

(5) This section expires July 1, 2021.

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