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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5525**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senator Short)

AN ACT Relating to whitetail deer population estimates; and adding a new section to chapter 77.12 RCW.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 77.12 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department must actively work toward managing whitetail deer populations in district one of region one with the goal of increasing the deer counted per mile in the late summer surveys to fall within the range of eight to nine deer counted per survey mile.

(2) Each year, beginning with the 2019 population assessment, in district one of region one, the department must conduct a minimum of six traditional standardized fifteen mile transect counts including the Kelly hill standard transect in game management unit 105, the Douglas standard transect in game management unit 108, the Deep creek standard transect in game management units 108 and 111, the Summit valley standard transect in the central portion of game management unit 121, the Clayton standard transect in the southern portion of game management unit 117, and the Daisy-Maud standard transect in the western portion of game management unit 121. This subsection does not preclude the department from using additional, updated methods of counting, as long as those methods are an enhancement to the traditional transect data being collected under this subsection. It is critical that the consistency of the standardized transects listed in this subsection be maintained to preserve the long-term trends of the data collected.

(3) The transect counts under this section must track and report buck-to-doe ratios and fawn-to-doe ratios, and also demonstrate whitetail deer density and trends. The department must conduct the first set of transect counts as described in subsection (2) of this section in the month of August to determine buck-to-doe ratio, density, and overall population. The department must conduct the second set of transect counts as described in subsection (2) of this section in the month of September to determine fawn-to-doe ratio, density, and overall population. The ratios are an important factor to understand the current and future health of the whitetail deer population.

(4) The department shall convene two annual meetings in district one of region one to discuss transect counts with a local, nonprofit wildlife group based in Stevens county that has expertise in wildlife management and hunting. One meeting must be held to discuss the department's plan for that calendar year's transect counts and methodology and to coordinate local volunteers to assist in data collection. Another meeting must be held to discuss the findings and outcome of that calendar year's transect counts, buck-to-doe ratios and fawn-to-doe ratios, density and trends, updated rolling ten-year average, and compliant hunter harvest data. The department should use these meetings to seek opportunities to integrate local knowledge and expertise into its work on wildlife management and hunting seasons.

(5) To increase meaningful public participation in the establishment of hunting seasons, the department must provide the public with timely access to both compliant and noncompliant hunter harvest data. The department must make compliant hunter harvest data available to the public fourteen days after the January 31st deadline for hunters to report their harvest to the department. The department must make noncompliant hunter harvest data available no later than thirty days prior to a commission meeting to establish hunting seasons. The data must include a description of the assumptions and methodology used for determining noncompliant hunter harvest data.

(6) The department must recalculate the estimate of noncompliant hunter harvest data for 2015 through 2019 using the methodology used in 2013 and 2014. By December 31, 2019, the department must report the recalculation and the differences between the two methodologies to the natural resources committees of the legislature and the commission and make the information available to the public.

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