

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5504

As of January 13, 2022

Title: An act relating to extending current discover pass free days from state parks to all state recreation sites and lands.

Brief Description: Extending current discover pass free days from state parks to all state recreation sites and lands.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick, Van De Wege, Billig, Conway, Das, Lovelett, Mullet, Nguyen, Randall, Saldaña, Wagoner, Wilson, J. and Wilson, L.; by request of Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/13/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the State Parks and Recreation Commission, in consultation with the departments of Fish and Wildlife and Natural Resources, to designate up to 12 days per calendar year where entry to a recreation site or lands is free.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Public Lands. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the State Parks and Recreation Commission (SPRC) are charged with managing the public lands of the state. DFW owns or manages nearly 1 million acres of public land and 500 water access areas for fish and wildlife, habitat conservation, and wildlife-related recreation. DNR protects and manages 5.6 million acres of state-owned land. The state parks system includes 124 developed parks covering

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approximately 138,000 acres.

Discover Pass Program. In 2011, the Legislature established the Discover Pass Program. The Discover Pass establishes a user fee for motor vehicle access to recreational areas managed by SPRC, DNR, and DFW. A Discover Pass costs \$30 per year, while a day-use permit costs \$11.50 per day. The annual Discover Pass is transferrable between two vehicles. The penalty for failure to display the required recreation access pass or permit is \$99. The penalty is reduced to \$59 if an individual provides proof of a Discover Pass purchase to the court within 15 days of being notified of a violation.

Exemptions. A Discover Pass or day-use permit is not required for the following circumstances:

- when camping at a state park;
- when parked in a designated 30-minute short-term parking area;
- for holders of certain hunting and fishing licenses on the DFW recreation lands and water-access sites; for those individuals, a vehicle access pass is required for vehicle access to the DFW lands and boat launches;
- portions of DNR land considered to not be for recreational purposes; and
- persons or entities who use, possess, or enter lands owned or managed by DFW, DNR, and SPRC for purposes consistent with a written authorization from the respected agency, including but not limited to leases, contracts, and easements.

Summary of Bill: In consultation with DFW and DNR, SPRC must designate up to 12 days per calendar year where entry to a recreation site or lands is free.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 8, 2022.

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: PRO: The Discover Pass provides a benefit for public lands, but it is important to provide some free access. The bill extends the current 12 Discover Pass free days to all state recreational lands. This bill will create less confusion for the public who have a Discover Pass and want to go to DNR or DFW property on those free days. This bill formalizes collaborative work between DNR, DFW, and SPRC. This bill will provide more equal access to public lands. This bill will address confusion and frustration that the public has faced when accessing public lands on state parks free days. Current law is confusing to the public and DFW tries not to enforce on free days when someone is at a DFW wildlife area, not a park.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Judy Warnick, Prime Sponsor; Brian Considine,

Department of Natural Resources.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: PRO: Tom McBride, WDFW.