

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1538

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to claims for damage to wild shrubs or range land vegetation.

Brief Description: Allowing claims for damage by wild animals or wild birds to wild shrubs or range land vegetation.

Sponsors: Representatives Mastin, Chandler, Grant, McMorris, Schoesler, Chappell, Foreman, Fuhrman, Basich, Buck, Johnson and Thompson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/10/95, 2/14/95 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Fuhrman, Chairman; Buck, Vice Chairman; Pennington, Vice Chairman; Basich, Ranking Minority Member; Beeksma; Cairnes; Elliot; Sheldon; Stevens; B. Thomas and Thompson.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Regala, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen and Romero.

Staff: Rick Anderson (786-7114).

Background: The director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife is authorized to pay up to \$2,000 for damages caused by deer or elk (RCW 77.12.280).

State law prohibits the department from allowing claims for damage to wild shrubs or range land vegetation (RCW 77.12.265).

Summary of Substitute Bill: The bill specifies that only crop damages are eligible for reimbursement. For the purpose of allowing claims, "crop" is defined as an agricultural product, including but not limited to, range land grass vegetation. "Wild shrubs" are specifically excluded from damage claims.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill adds provisions defining "crop" and specifying that only crops are eligible for damage reimbursement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 1995.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Deer and elk herds are causing significant damage to agricultural lands, especially in southeastern Washington. Deer and elk are resources of the state. Ranchers should not be required to incur significant costs to feed these state resources.

Testimony Against: Claims for damage caused by deer and elk have increased from \$40,000 in 1980-82 to \$1 million in 1992-94. Allowing compensation for wild shrubs and range land vegetation will greatly increase damage claims. Department efforts to reduce damage are focused on prevention rather than compensation.

Testified: Representative Dave Mastin, prime sponsor; Kent Lebsack, Washington Cattlemen's Association; Bill Wolf, private citizen; and Jake Schlee, private citizen (all in favor). Joe LaTourrette, Washington Wildlife Federation (opposed). Dayna Matthews, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.