

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6551

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to agricultural grazing on state-owned and managed lands.

Brief Description: Managing grazing lands.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Loveland, Rasmussen, Snyder, Morton, Oke, Prince, A. Anderson, Hargrove, Hochstatter, Winsley and Sellar).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/20/96, 2/21/96 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Fuhrman, Chairman; Buck, Vice Chairman; Pennington, Vice Chairman; Basich, Ranking Minority Member; Regala, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Beeksma; Elliot; Hatfield; Jacobsen; Keiser; Sheldon; B. Thomas; L. Thomas and Thompson.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: In 1993, the Legislature directed the (then separate) departments of Fisheries and Wildlife to develop goals to preserve, protect, and perpetuate wildlife and fish on shrub steppe habitat or on lands that are currently agricultural lands, rangelands, or grazable woodlands. The Legislature then directed the Conservation Commission to assemble a technical advisory committee to develop standards that achieve the goals developed by Fisheries and Wildlife. The technical advisory committee and the Conservation Commission completed their work on the ecosystems standards in December 1994.

The same 1993 legislation directed the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Wildlife to implement practices necessary to meet the Conservation Commission's ecosystem standards on the agricultural and grazing lands managed by the two agencies. Agricultural and grazing leases issued after December 31, 1994, for these state-owned lands are subject to practices to achieve the ecosystems standards. Application of the standards to privately-owned lands is strictly voluntary.

Summary of Amended Bill: The Conservation Commission ecosystem standards are defined as desired ecological conditions. The standards are not intended to prescribe practices. Land managers are encouraged to use an adaptive management approach in selecting and implementing practices that work towards meeting the standards, based on the best available science and evaluation tools. The standards are to be achieved by applying appropriate land management practices on riparian lands and on uplands to reach the desired ecological conditions.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Natural Resources are to work with their lessees and permittees in a collaborative process with regard to the ecosystem standards. The land manager and lessee or permittee are to look at the land together and make every effort to reach agreement on management and resource objectives for the land under consideration. They are then to discuss management options and make every effort to reach agreement on which of the available options will be used to achieve the agreed-upon objectives. No land manager or owner ever gives up his or her management prerogative. Efforts are to be made to make land management plans economically feasible for landowners, managers, and lessees and to make the land management plan compatible with the lessee's entire operation. Coordinated resource management planning is encouraged where multiple ownerships or multiple management practices are involved.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife is to consider multiple use, including grazing, on lands owned or managed by the department where it is compatible with the management objectives of the land. The Department of Natural Resources is to allow multiple use on lands owned or managed by the department where multiple use is compatible with the department's multiple-use statutes. All state agricultural lands, grazing lands, and grazable woodlands are to be managed in keeping with the statutory and constitutional mandates under which the two agencies operate.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: The amendments to the substitute bill are for language clarification purposes only.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This is a good balance for grazing lands and protection of wildlife. This is a move in the right direction. This is an agreed-upon bill. It is good for the environment. We support the collaborative effort in the bill drafting and in

implementation in the field. DNR must have a partnership with its lessees. We commend the cooperative process to get to this point.

Testimony Against: There is no mechanism in place to guarantee enforcement of this bill.

Testified: Senator Valoria Loveland, prime sponsor; Scott Barr; Vicki Christiansen, Department of Natural Resources; Ric Abbett, Trout Unlimited; Rob Kavanaugh (all in favor); and Dawn Vyvyan, Yakima Nation.