

FINAL BILL REPORT

SB 6074

C 2 L 95 E1

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Expanding the authority of the fish and wildlife commission.

Sponsors: Senators Sutherland and Rasmussen.

Background: A state commission has been involved in the management of game fish and wildlife since 1933, when a voter initiative created the state Department of Game and the Game Commission. The new commission was charged with hiring the director of the department, establishing the direction and priorities of the agency, adopting hunting and fishing regulations, and other duties. Funding for the agency for the next few decades came primarily through the sale of various licenses, tags, and permits and from excise taxes on sporting goods.

By 1987, the agency was in a precarious fiscal situation. Legislation enacted in 1987 changed the name of the agency to the Department of Wildlife and provided an infusion of \$8 million to the agency from the state general fund. The legislation also changed the commission's name to the Wildlife Commission, and appointment authority for the agency's director shifted from the commission to the Governor.

In 1993, the Department of Fisheries and the Department of Wildlife merged into the current Department of Fish and Wildlife. The legislation merging the two agencies directed the commission (renamed the Fish and Wildlife Commission) to review its area of responsibility in the consolidated agency and to provide recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor on any necessary changes in its statutory authority.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission completed its review and submitted its recommendations in November 1994. The commission recommends that its authority be expanded to include the following:

- Regulatory authority for all species, including food fish and shellfish;
- Regulatory authority for all user groups, including commercial users;
- Authority for all department agreements, including tribal, interstate, and international agreements;
- Budget approval for the agency;
- Approval of department rules and regulations;
- Responsibility for selection of commission staff; and
- Authority to appoint the director of the department.

Summary: The Legislature supports the recommendations of the Fish and Wildlife Commission with regard to its proposed role in the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Initial statutory changes are made to: Expand the commission's authority to food fish and shellfish and to commercial user groups; give the commission authority over all department agreements; allow the commission to approve the department's budget and rules; and give the commission the responsibility of selecting its own staff and appointing the director of the department. These statutory changes take effect July 1, 1996. By July 1, 1996, the commission must submit a report to the House and Senate Natural Resources Committees identifying other changes necessary for implementing the commission's recommendations.

In making appointments to the commission, the Governor is required to seek a balance reflecting all aspects of fish and wildlife, including representation recommended by organized groups representing sportfishers, commercial fishers, hunters, private landowners, and environmentalists. Commission appointees must comply with state laws on ethics in public service and public disclosure.

A referendum clause specifies that the act must be submitted for a vote of the people at the next succeeding general election.

Votes on Final Passage:

First Special Session

Senate	29	3
Senate	30	14 (Senate reconsidered)
House	68	29
House	73	24 (House reconsidered)

Effective: July 1, 1996 (Sections 2-43, upon voter approval at November 1995 general election)