

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SJM 8015

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Ecology & Parks, February 15, 1995

**Brief Description:** Requesting a variance in order to preserve man-made wetlands.

**Sponsors:** Senators Fraser, Swecker, Oke, McDonald, Wojahn, Deccio, McAuliffe, Hargrove, Rasmussen and Winsley.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Ecology & Parks: 2/14/95, 2/15/95 [DPS].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECOLOGY & PARKS

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 8015 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; C. Anderson, Vice Chair; McAuliffe, McDonald, Spanel and Swecker.

**Staff:** Cathy Baker (786-7708)

**Background:** The Centralia Mining Company operates a surface coal mine at a site located outside the city of Centralia. The coal produced at the mine is sold to the Centralia Steam Plant which supplies power to Seattle City Light, Tacoma City Light, Snohomish County PUD, and other utilities throughout the Northwest.

Surface coal mining operations are regulated under the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. Under the act, the Office of Surface Mining within the Department of Interior has adopted regulations that establish standards for the operation and reclamation of surface coal mines. Coal mine operators are required to obtain a permit ensuring that the operation meets the federal standards. In Washington State, permits are obtained directly from the Office of Surface Mining.

Permits for surface coal mines include extensive requirements for reclamation of a site after mining operations are complete. Among these requirements, mine operators are generally required to return the site to the topography and drainage patterns that existed prior to the mining activity.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** Findings are made regarding the importance of preserving wetlands for wildlife habitat. Findings are also made regarding the importance of certain wetlands created at the site of the Centralia Mining Company's mine in Centralia.

The Memorial requests that the Department of Interior, Office of Surface Mining, amend its surface mining reclamation regulations in order to recognize the climatic differences of surface mine operations in different regions of the U.S. and to allow for the preservation of

certain wetlands that have been created as a result of substantial mining activities. An emphasis is placed on preserving wetlands of significant size and value.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** Stylistic changes are made.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Testimony For:** There should be more flexibility in federal regulations to allow companies like the Centralia Mining Company to retain wetlands that have been created as a result of mining operations. These wetlands have important ecological values and provide recreational opportunities as well.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Ron Newbry, Pacificorp (pro); Blake Webster, Interwest Mining Corporation (pro); Dave Kuper, Ducks Unlimited (pro).