

FINAL BILL REPORT

HB 2797

C 50 L 98

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Modifying the membership of the natural heritage advisory council.

Sponsors: Representatives Regala, Buck, Ogden, Tokuda, Hatfield and Kessler.

House Committee on Natural Resources

Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Parks

Background: When the Legislature established the state's natural area preserve system in 1972, the Legislature created a seven-member Natural Preserves Advisory Committee to assist the Department of Natural Resources with the preserve system. In 1981, the Legislature increased the size of the advisory committee to 15 members and renamed it the Natural Heritage Advisory Council. Of the 15 members, five must be recognized experts in the ecology of natural areas. Four members are public members from various regions of the state. The public members must include or represent at least one private forest landowner and one private agricultural landowner. These nine members are appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands. When the Legislature made this change in 1981, the remaining advisory council members were non-voting members from six state agencies: Game, Ecology, Fisheries, Natural Resources, State Parks, and the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation. The Legislature later amended the state agency portion of the composition of the advisory council, first to reflect the change from Department of Game to Department of Wildlife, and then to reflect the merger of the Department of Fisheries with the Department of Wildlife. When the Legislature reduced the number of state agencies on the council due to the merger, it did not change the total number of members of the advisory council. The Legislature did not, however, provide a method to appoint a fifteenth member.

Before the Department of Natural Resources seeks to acquire property for either a natural area preserve or a natural resources conservation area, the department first establishes a boundary defining the area in which the department may consider purchases. The department must hold a public hearing in the county where the majority of land in a proposed conservation area is located prior to establishing this boundary. There is not a similar local public hearing requirement for establishing boundaries for natural area preserves.

Summary: The number of public members on the Natural Heritage Advisory Council is increased from four members to five. This yields a 15-member committee

composed of five experts, five public members from various regions in the state, and five non-voting members from state agencies.

The Department of Natural Resources must hold a public hearing in the county where the majority of land in a proposed natural area preserve is located prior to establishing the boundary of the preserve.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 96 0

Senate 48 0

Effective: June 11, 1998