

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5104

As Passed House-Amended:

April 18, 1997

Title: An act relating to game birds.

Brief Description: Creating the Washington pheasant enhancement program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Oke, Loveland, Hale, Morton, Swecker, Rossi, Snyder, West, Bauer, Haugen and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 4/1/97, 4/4/97 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House-Amended: 4/18/97, 61-34.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Buck, Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Regala, Ranking Minority Member; Butler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Anderson; Hatfield and Sheldon.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Sump, Vice Chairman; Chandler and Pennington.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: A person who hunts pheasant must purchase a hunting license and an upland game bird permit. A western Washington upland game permit costs \$35. An eastern Washington upland game permit costs \$10. The Department of Fish and Wildlife enhances pheasant hunting opportunities in western Washington by raising, purchasing, and releasing some 40,000 pheasants per year.

The department reports that the pheasant population in eastern Washington has declined since the 1960s and 1970s, as has the number of hunters buying eastern Washington upland game permits and participating in pheasant hunting.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that pheasant populations in eastern Washington have greatly decreased from their historic high levels and that pheasant

hunting success rates have plummeted. The number of pheasant hunters has decreased due to reduced hunting success. The bill finds there is an opportunity to enhance the pheasant population by release of pen-reared pheasants and through habitat enhancements.

The eastern Washington pheasant enhancement program is created within the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The purpose of the program is to improve the harvest of pheasants by releasing pen-reared pheasants on sites accessible for public hunting and by providing grants for habitat enhancement on public or private lands under agreement with the department. The department may purchase pheasants from private contractors or produce pheasants from department-sanctioned cooperative projects, whichever is less expensive. Any surplus hen pheasants must be made available to landowners who voluntarily open their lands to public pheasant hunting. The eastern Washington pheasant enhancement program must not impair the department's western Washington pheasant release program or conflict with or supplant other department efforts to improve upland bird habitat and populations.

Beginning September 1, 1997, eastern Washington pheasant hunters must pay an additional annual surcharge of \$10. The moneys raised by the surcharge fund the new enhancement program. The surcharge moneys are to be deposited in the eastern Washington pheasant enhancement account, which the bill creates. Moneys in the account are subject to legislative appropriation and may be used to improve pheasant habitat or to purchase or produce pheasants. The department must use at least 80 percent of expenditures from the account to purchase or produce pheasants. Moneys in the account may not be used to purchase land. Moneys in the account may be used for grants to improve pheasant habitat on public or private lands that are open to public hunting. The department may enter into partnerships with private landowners, nonprofit corporations, cooperative groups, and federal or state agencies for pheasant habitat enhancement in areas that will be available for public hunting.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission must establish special pheasant hunting opportunities for juvenile hunters in eastern Washington, beginning with the 1998 season. The department must work with the Department of Corrections to investigate the feasibility of producing pheasants for the new enhancement program using inmate labor and facilities at the Walla Walla State Penitentiary or other eastern Washington state correctional facilities. The investigation must include a comparison of the costs of producing pheasants at a correctional facility versus the costs of purchasing pheasants for this enhancement program. The two agencies must report back to the Legislature on the findings of their investigation by January 1, 1998.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Pheasant populations were much higher in the 1960s and 1970s but have now dropped significantly. Successful harvests have also dropped greatly. These decreases have had an impact both to hunters and to local economies. It is especially frustrating for young, first-time hunters. This bill will provide opportunities for the department to release pheasants and for grants to improve habitat.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Bob Oke, prime sponsor, and Dave Brittell, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (both in favor).