

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2381

As Passed House:
February 8, 2006

Title: An act relating to allowing the reintroduction of beavers into the historic habitat of the species.

Brief Description: Authorizing a beaver relocation permit.

Sponsors: By Representatives Kretz, Blake, Sump, Buri, Haler, Ericks and Holmquist.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources, Ecology & Parks: 1/10/06, 1/19/06 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/8/06, 98-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a permit that allows landowners to trap beavers in areas of the state where they are considered a nuisance and relocate the beavers to properties where the animals may improve the local ecosystem.
- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife to use live trapping techniques when trapping nuisance beavers and relocate the beavers to properties owned by requesting landowners.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives B. Sullivan, Chair; Uptegrove, Vice Chair; Buck, Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Blake, Chandler, Dickerson, Eickmeyer, Hunt, Kagi and Orcutt.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has the authority to authorize the removal or killing of wildlife that is destroying or injuring property. The ultimate disposition of the removed wildlife is determined by the Director of the Department. The Director may also enter into written agreements with landowners that are designed to protect the subject property from further wildlife damage.

Private individuals may trap beavers if they hold a state trapping license. All trapping must be conducted in accordance with the trapping seasons established by the Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Summary of Bill:

Beaver relocation permits

The Department is required to issue a permit, at no cost to the applicant, that will allow the holder to capture live beavers in areas of the state where large beaver populations are considered a nuisance. The permit also allows the holder to transport the beavers within the state and release the beavers on property owned by the permit holder. The permit holder must also possess a state trapping license or must contract with the holder of a trapping license for the actual capture of the beaver.

Beaver relocation permits may be limited by the Department to areas of the state where there is a low probability of released beavers becoming a problem, there is evidence of a historic endemic beaver population, and where conditions exist for the released beavers to improve the riparian area into which they are introduced.

The Department may condition beaver relocation permits to maximize the success and minimize the risk of the relocation. Release site conditions that the Department may consider include the gradient of the stream, the adequacy of food sources, the elevation, and the stream geomorphology. In addition, the Department may also condition how the capture and release is performed by the permit holder. This includes establishing the timing of the capture and release, the age of the beavers involved, the number of beavers involved, and requirements for providing supplemental food and lodging materials.

Department-initiated beaver trapping

In instances when the employees of the Department are required to remove nuisance beavers, the employees must utilize live trapping techniques whenever possible. The Department must work with private landowners to release the captured beavers at locations where they have been requested.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Beavers can do great things for wildlife and fisheries, but the current beaver management practices are to kill the beavers instead of relocating them to an area where they can be put to beneficial use. Benefits of beavers include water storage and retention, increased

stream flows, biodiversity enhancement, and the restoration of watershed function. Beaver relocation permits would give landowners a valuable tool for protecting their habitat. The Department can do this already, but a bill will be a strong signal that the Legislature wants them to make beaver relocation a priority.

Testimony Against: The Department currently has the authority to do what is required by this bill. Capturing and relocating beavers could have implications in the spread of disease, and there is a fear that the beavers will migrate to areas where they are not wanted. There has been an increase in beaver damage complaints statewide, and relocating these beavers may just cause more filed complaints.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kretz, prime sponsor; Patrick Connor, Washington Farm Bureau; and Jack Field, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

(Opposed) Steve Pozzanghera, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.