

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1935

As Reported by House Committee On:
Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs

Title: An act relating to state parks and recreation.

Brief Description: Concerning state parks and recreation.

Sponsors: Representatives Haler, Hudgins, Goodman, Angel, Wilcox, Alexander, Seaquist, Appleton, Ryu, Tarleton, Zeiger, Moscoso and Bergquist.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community Development, Housing & Tribal Affairs: 2/20/13, 2/21/13 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires a General Fund transfer to the Recreation Access Pass Account in the amount equal to the sales of Discover Passes and day-use permits for the preceding year.
- Requires a General Fund transfer to the State Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account in the amount equal to the total fees waived under the Park Passes program during the preceding year.
- Determines that vehicles displaying a State Parks special license plate are not required to display the Discover Pass or day-use permit within a state park.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives McCoy, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Angel, Ranking Minority Member; Johnson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Pike and Ryu.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Santos and Sawyer.

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

The State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) owns and manages a diverse system of parks with many different types of facilities and historic buildings and a variety of recreation programs. State Parks operates 116 open and developed parks and owns other undeveloped state lands.

State Parks is made up of a seven member commission appointed by the Governor. Members serve a six-year term, expiring on December 31 of even-numbered years.

State Parks Revenues.

State Parks receives revenue from a variety of sources, including user fees and donations. State Parks sets rates and charges camping fees in park campgrounds. Under the park passes program, State Parks issues different passes for specially designated groups that qualify for discounts or exemptions from park fees. State Parks also receives funds from voluntary donations made by vehicle owners at the time license fees are collected.

The Discover Pass and day-use permits allow motor vehicle access to recreation areas on state lands managed by State Parks, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). A Discover Pass costs \$30 per year. A day-use permit costs \$10 per day. Monetary penalties may be assessed for failure to comply with the Discover Pass and day-use permit requirements.

State Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account.

All receipts from user fees, concessions, leases, donations, and other park activities are deposited into the State Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account (RS Account), created in the State Treasury. Expenditures from the RS Account may be used for park operations, park facility development and maintenance, enhancing park stewardship, and other park purposes. Expenditures may only be made after appropriation from the Legislature.

Recreation Access Pass Account.

All money received from the sale of the Discover Pass and day-use permits is deposited into the Recreation Access Pass Account (RAP Account). The first \$71 million in revenue is distributed on a proportional basis among State Parks (84 percent), the DNR (8 percent), and the DFW (8 percent). Revenues above \$71 million are distributed equally among those agencies.

The State Parks' distribution share of the RAP Account is deposited into the RS Account. The proceeds from the RAP Account must be used for the purposes of operating and maintaining state parks.

State Parks Special License Plates.

The Department of Licensing issues a special license plate recognizing state parks as a premier destination of uncommon quality that preserves significant natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources. The initial fee for a State Parks special license plate is \$40, and \$30 for renewal. After administrative costs are deducted, all revenue from the sale of the special plates is deposited into the State Parks Education and Enhancement Account.

Expenditures from this account may only be used for public educational opportunities and to enhance state parks.

Summary of Bill:

Transfer to Recreation Access Pass Account.

Each year, the State Treasurer must transfer from the General Fund to the RAP Account an amount equal to the sales of Discover Passes and day-use permits for the immediately preceding year. The matching funds must be distributed in the same manner and proportions as Discover Pass and day-use permit sales revenue is distributed in the RAP Account.

Transfer to the State Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account.

Each year, the State Treasurer must transfer from the General Fund to the RS Account an amount equal to the total fees waived under the Park Passes program during the immediately preceding year.

State Parks License Plate.

The Discover Pass or day-use permit is not required for motor vehicle access in a state park for persons who display a State Parks special license plate.

State Parks Commissioners.

State Parks commissioners serve six-year terms, expiring on June 30 of odd-numbered years.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is an opening for how to handle State Parks. Self-sustainability does not work. This bill provides a mechanism for a dollar-to-dollar General Fund match for Discover Pass sales, which will bring the budget up to \$30 million, which is very much needed by State Parks. This bill does not replace the commission, but makes the terms expire on the fiscal calendar. The existing 2013 biennial budget assumptions reflect a lack of taxpayer support for State Parks, while this bill reflects a continued general commitment of taxpayer funding for State Parks. The DNR is supportive of the matching funds provision in the bill to give the state agencies the amount of revenue anticipated by the Discover Pass.

State Parks volunteers have stepped up to support the parks and formed groups dedicated to parks and are trying to do their part. Parks are outdoor classrooms and serve as part of the educational system. This bill provides the balance of funding that was not part of the agency

request legislation. The Parks Foundation provides private funding but cannot adequately support the funding of State Parks. This bill provides the money State Parks needs. The Discover Pass is running 50 percent short of anticipated revenue. The General Fund match along with funding of costs for the pass programs in this bill gets State Parks the roughly \$30 million needed. The special license plate is recognition for people who already buy the Discover Pass.

(In support with concerns) There are five existing wildlife license plates. Part of the business plan for the Discover Pass focuses on delivering a consistent message about what is required. One more exception creates additional confusion. There are about 5,200 wildlife plates sold every year. That group might ask for their own exception, adding to the confusion. This is a minor issue for the overall bill.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Haler, prime sponsor; Daniel Farbar, Washington State Parks; Kyle Blum, Department of Natural Resources; Brian Yearout, Washington Federation of State Employees; Helen Hepp, Friends of Shafer and Lake Sylvia State Parks; Betty Tabbut, League of Women Voters; Peter Reid, Washington State Parks Foundation; Ralph Munro; and Jim King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation.

(In support with concerns) Greg Schirato, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Janie Brumfield, Marcia Smith, and Gregory Johnson, Friends of Shafer and Lake Sylvia State Parks; and Doug Levy, Washington Recreation and Parks Association.