

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5653

As of February 14, 2013

Title: An act relating to promoting a balanced financing system for state parks programs and services in order to facilitate resource stewardship, interpretative activities, cultural events, and works of art in state parks.

Brief Description: Promoting a balanced financing system for state parks programs and services in order to facilitate resource stewardship, interpretative activities, cultural events, and works of art in state parks.

Sponsors: Senators Pearson, Rolfes, Honeyford, Fraser, Smith, Hewitt, Kohl-Welles and Parlette; by request of Parks and Recreation Commission.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 2/12/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: State Parks Operations and Funding. The State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) manages a system that includes 117 developed parks stretching across approximately 120,000 acres throughout the state.

Between 2001 and 2011, the Legislature took a number of policy and fiscal actions related to the funding of State Parks. These include, at various times, the use of funding mechanisms including parking fees, voluntary donations, and various fund transfers for the support of State Parks. During that period, the state general fund (GF-S) support ranged from a high of \$95 million in the 2007-2009 biennium to a low of \$41 million in the 2009-2011 biennium.

In 2011, the Legislature created the Discover Pass and generally required its purchase for access to state recreation lands, including state parks. The 2011 Operating Budget provided one-time funding of approximately \$17 million of GF-S funds to assist State Parks to move toward the goal of becoming a self-supporting agency. Due to lower than expected Discover Pass revenue, State Parks received an additional \$4 million in one-time funding from state aquatic lands revenue in 2012. While initial 2011 projections estimated approximately \$64 million in Discover Pass revenue for the biennium, actual revenue totaled about \$15.7 million for fiscal year 2012.

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.

State Parks Pass Programs. The statutorily created State Parks pass programs provide free access to, and either free or discounted camping at State Parks to those who qualify for a senior citizen's pass, a disability pass, a lifetime veteran's disability pass, or a foster home pass.

State Parks Interpretation Authority. Under current law, State Parks has the broad authority to manage the use, care, and administration of State Parks. Specifically, State Parks may provide environmental interpretive activities for purposes that:

- explain the functions, history, and cultural aspects of ecosystems;
- explain the relationship between human needs, human behaviors and attitudes, and the environment; and
- offer experiences and information to increase appreciation and stewardship of the environment and its uses.

State Parks may solicit assistance from and enter into agreements with private organizations and public agencies interested in conservation and environmental interpretation. No commercial advertising is allowed under these agreements, but logos or sponsorship credit lines may be permitted.

State Parks Foundation. In 2000, the Legislature directed the creation of the State Parks Gift Foundation (Foundation) to solicit support for State Parks, cooperate with other organizations, and encourage gifts to support State Parks. The Legislature established requirements for initial board membership, terms, and succession. Among its other roles, the Foundation awards grants to State Parks for eligible projects submitted to the Foundation for funding. Monies provided to State Parks may not supplant preexisting fund sources.

Summary of Bill: Requires Budget Requests For Foregone Revenue from State Parks Pass Programs. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) must report the revenue foregone by the State Parks pass programs to the Legislature by August 1 of each even-numbered year. In turn, State Parks must request GF-S reimbursement for these foregone revenues. The amount requested may not exceed the amount identified in OFM's report, although State Parks may seek GF-Ss for other needs.

Specifies the Role of Natural, Cultural, and Historical Interpretation at State Parks. Current statutes governing interpretation at State Parks are modified to reemphasize and expand State Parks' role in providing natural, cultural, and historical interpretation. This includes specifying authority to:

- explain the diverse human heritage and cultural changes over time in the state;
- protect natural, cultural, or historical resources from the impacts of human activities; and
- increase awareness, appreciation, and enjoyment of the state's ethnic and cultural heritage and contemporary works of art.

The specific prohibition on commercial advertising in State Parks is removed and replaced with general authority to solicit assistance and enter into agreements with the State Parks Foundation and private and public sector entities that are interested in stewardship and interpretation.

Expands the Role of the State Parks Foundation. The role of the State Parks Foundation, statutorily renamed from the State Parks Gift Foundation, is expanded and further specified to include the following:

- taking the lead role in soliciting, recognizing, and cultivating relationships with donors and sponsors, in coordination with State Parks;
- building constituencies and engaging in public outreach; and
- in addition to providing grants to State Parks, also awarding funds to friends groups and other associations formed to benefit State Parks based on criteria developed in cooperation with State Parks.

Language prohibiting funds provided by the Foundation from supplanting preexisting state funds is repealed. The terms, method of appointment, and authority of the board of directors are established under the statutes governing nonprofit corporations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will continue to support State Parks programs which provide educational experiences in regards to Washington State cultural diversity. Further, it protects a broad agency role in developing private support for State Parks. We should continue to use the Discover Pass as a funding source for State Parks while pursuing innovative techniques to increase this revenue source; this in addition to a GF-S revenue will contribute what State Parks needs to provide experiences that visitors and citizens of Washington State have come to appreciate.

OTHER: While supportive of the bill work with agency and interest groups, leasing of certain park facilities are at dramatically reduced market rates, resulting in agency deficits and reductions. The reimbursement from legislative exemptions should be distributed evenly across entities involved.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Jill Linzee, NW Heritage Resources; Peter Reid, WA State Parks Foundation; Jim Richards, WA Wildlife & Recreation Coalition (WWRC); Joe Mentor, Elliot Marks, WWRC Seattle; Steve Milner, Daniel Farber, Peter Herzog, State Parks; Allyson Brooks, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

OTHER: Jeanine Livingston, WA Federation of State Employees; Kyle Blum, Department of Natural Resources.