

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2366

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Fisheries & Wildlife*

Title: An act relating to a merger of the departments of fisheries and wildlife.

Brief Description: Requiring the legislative budget committee to study the feasibility of merging the department of fisheries and the department of wildlife.

Sponsor(s): Representatives R. King, Wilson, Ludwig, Bray, Orr, May, Ferguson and Anderson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Fisheries & Wildlife, February 7, 1992, DPA.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FISHERIES & WILDLIFE**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 11 members: Representatives R. King, Chair; Morris, Vice Chair; Wilson, Ranking Minority Member; Fuhrman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; G. Cole; Haugen; Hochstatter; Orr; Padden; and Spanel.

Staff: Keitlyn Watson (786-7310).

Background: Prior to 1932, the departments of Fisheries and Game and the counties shared responsibility for administering Washington's wildlife. The governor appointed the department director. Initiative 62 passed in 1932, which created a separate Game Department. It established one statewide Game Commission with responsibility for setting agency policy, setting seasons and bag limits for taking game, and hiring the agency director. In 1987, the Legislature passed HB 758, which changed the name of the Department of Game to the Department of Wildlife, and gave the governor the authority to appoint the director of the department. Currently, two agencies, the Department of Fisheries and the Department of Wildlife, manage these resources in Washington. The governor also appoints the director of the Department of Fisheries.

The Department of Wildlife manages three classes of fish, which are anadromous trout, resident trout, and warmwater

fish, and wildlife for non-commercial purposes. The Department of Fisheries manages food fish and shellfish. Both agencies have enforcement and habitat protection responsibilities.

The mandate of the Department of Wildlife is to preserve, protect and perpetuate wildlife and, secondarily, to manage wildlife for recreation. The mandate of the Department of Fisheries is to preserve, protect, and perpetuate food fish and shellfish, and to maintain the economic well-being of the fishing industry in the state.

In every state except Washington, one state agency manages all anadromous fish resources. In almost all other states, wildlife and fish management is consolidated into one agency.

In 1980, the Legislative Budget Committee issued a report evaluating the feasibility of combining the Washington departments of Fisheries and Game. The report identified savings of \$1.4 million and 9 full-time employees for the 1981-1983 biennium, but did not make a recommendation on whether a merger should occur. The 1984 House Subcommittee on State Government Reorganization reviewed the possibility of merging the departments. No action was taken on the proposals, although the report identified a number of beneficial impacts.

Summary of Amended Bill: The Legislature finds that an evaluation of the current agency structure for fish and wildlife management in the state is in the public interest. The Legislative Budget Committee is directed to report, by January 1, 1993, on the feasibility of merging the departments of Fisheries and Wildlife, and is to recommend to the appropriate legislative committees whether a merger should occur. If the recommendation suggests that a merger should occur, the report should address the timing and methods of implementing the reorganization.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The amended bill removes a legislative finding that there are inefficiencies in the current system of fish and wildlife management in the state. The amended bill adds a finding that an evaluation of the current agency structure for fish and wildlife management in the state is in the public interest.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The Legislative Budget Committee would provide an objective look at the issue of a merger. A suggestion is to add a requirement that the Oregon experience in merging two agencies be examined. A look at this issue would be beneficial.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Ed Manary, Department of Fisheries (supports concept); and Pam Madsen, Department of Wildlife (in favor).