

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4029

As Passed House:
February 12, 1998

Brief Description: Regarding the Olympic National Park as a Biosphere Reserve within the Man and Biosphere Program.

Sponsors: Representatives Buck, Schoesler, Pennington, Honeyford, Carrell, Radcliff, Benson, D. Schmidt, Koster and Sump.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 1/23/98, 1/28/98 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/98, 74-22.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Buck, Chairman; Sump, Vice Chairman; Thompson, Vice Chairman; Butler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Chandler; Eickmeyer; Hatfield and Pennington.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Regala, Ranking Minority Member; and Anderson.

Staff: Linda Byers (786-7129).

Background: In 1970, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established the "Man and the Biosphere" program. The program allows for the creation of "biosphere reserves." According to the U.S. Department of State, the main functions of biosphere reserves are conservation of important biological resources; development of environmentally sound economic growth; support of environmental research, monitoring, education, and training; and as a framework to accomplish these three things. More than 300 biosphere reserves have been established in more than 80 countries.

In the United States, the U.S. National Committee for the Man and the Biosphere Program administers the U.S. version of this program. The committee is comprised of representatives from several federal agencies, from U.S. universities, and from private sector organizations. There are 47 designated biosphere reserves in the United States.

In order to become an internationally-recognized biosphere reserve, a federal, state, or local agency or an organization or individual person must complete a nomination form and submit the nomination to the U.S. National Committee. The committee then evaluates the nominated area for inclusion as a biosphere reserve. If the committee approves the idea, the committee forwards the nomination to UNESCO. If that office approves the nomination, it issues the official international biosphere reserve designation. Legislative approval at the state or Congressional level is not required in order for a U.S. site to be designated a biosphere reserve.

In 1976, Olympic National Park was designated a biosphere reserve. The office of the superintendent of the park initiated the nomination process.

Summary of Bill: The memorial notes that the land in Washington included in a biosphere reserve was not included at the request of or with the consent of the Legislature and asserts that a request from the National Park Service should not be adequate to nominate land in the state as a biosphere reserve. The Legislature states that it is unalterably opposed to the inclusion of any lands in the state in a biodiversity treaty or any biodiversity program without the express consent of the Legislature. The Legislature also urges Congress, and especially the Washington delegation, to oppose the inclusion of any land in the state in any United Nations biosphere program without the express consent of the Legislature in the form of enacted legislation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: Other states are considering similar measures. There could be strict land use restrictions on the biosphere reserves. Landowners don't have input on land management policies of UNESCO. No elected official has consent or veto power on these designations. The application for Olympic National Park to be a biosphere reserve was not approved by the state. The superintendent of the park should not have that authority. The biodiversity treaty could keep people from using the lands in the ways that they are accustomed. Designations would not be a problem if they were to go through the normal channels, but the current process is not acceptable.

Testimony Against: The biosphere program has benefitted the region. It helps identify how ecosystems function on a large-scale basis. The designation helps the local economy by promoting tourism. It is not the intent of the biodiversity treaty to usurp authority over private property rights. There are other actions that impact the state where the state does not have a say such as military base closures and expansions.

Testified: Representative Jim Buck, prime sponsor (in favor); Ron Shultz, National Audubon Society (opposed); and Josh Baldi, Washington Environmental Council (opposed).