

SENATE BILL REPORT

HJM 4005

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Energy & Utilities, April 1, 1997

Brief Description: Returning land within the Hanford control zone to agricultural and wildlife uses.

Sponsors: Representatives Mulliken, Chandler, Hankins, Sheahan, Skinner, Lisk, Delvin, Clements, Honeyford, Schoesler, Mastin, Grant, Mielke and McMorris.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy & Utilities: 4/1/97 [DP, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Finkbeiner, Chair; Hochstatter, Vice Chair; Rossi and Strannigan.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Brown, Jacobsen and Swanson.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: Land acquisition by the federal government for the Hanford Reservation was authorized in February 1943. The Wahluke Slope Control Zone, an area north of the Columbia River, was established on November 15, 1943.

The federal Department of Energy has deactivated its reactors at the Hanford Reservation. It is now in the process of decontaminating them and related areas. As the department goes through this process, it will make decisions on how to remove portions of its lands from Department of Energy control. The Wahluke Slope Control Zone is currently managed as a wildlife area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages one portion of these lands, and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife manages the remainder of these lands.

Summary of Bill: The President of the United States, Congress, and the director of the Department of Energy are requested to reduce, except for needed buffer zones, the present boundaries of the Department of Energy's Hanford Control Zone on the Wahluke Slope to the area south of the Columbia River. They are asked to transfer in total the Wahluke Slope, presently under the custody and control of the Department of Energy, to the counties of Grant, Franklin, and Adams for the purpose of returning the land to its former agricultural use, as well as for wildlife and recreational use in areas along the Hanford Reach.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: Those relocated in 1943 were promised that their property would be returned to agriculture in ten years. The people want local control of this area. Joint control would also be acceptable. Returning the land to agriculture will put it on the tax rolls to help generate revenue to take care of the land. DOE does not have the money to take care of it.

Testimony Against: This land never was promised to go back to the farmers. People want continued federal control. There are already 500,000 acres of non-irrigated farm lands; why add 90,000 more? This land was not historically farmland. Less than 10 percent of it was ever farmed. Much of the land is not suitable for irrigation because irrigation will cause slumping of the white bluffs. The sediment consequently slumping into the Columbia Reach will contaminate the spawning grounds of 80 percent of the salmon. This shrub-steppe habitat is disappearing faster than forest and is a rich depository of never-before-seen wildlife. There are lots of other, more appropriate places to farm.

Testified: PRO: Representative Mulliken, prime sponsor; Jack Yorgesen, Michael Rowley, Washington Ag Forestry; Tim Snead, Grant County; CON: Rick Leumont, Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society; Gregory Stewart, Rivers Council of Washington; Maggie Coon, The Nature Conservancy.