

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5231

As of February 12, 2013

Title: An act relating to ensuring hunter safety.

Brief Description: Ensuring hunter safety.

Sponsors: Senators Sheldon, Ericksen, Tom, Kline, Fraser, Hatfield, Billig, Delvin, Rolfes, Shin and Conway; by request of Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 2/07/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Hunting License Requirement Generally. When purchasing a hunting license, persons born after January 1, 1972, must present certification that they have completed a program of hunter education. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) may also accept certificates from other states. The Washington hunter education program consists of at least ten hours of instruction in safety, conservation, sportsmanship, and firearm handling. Average classes involve four to six sessions and require the student to pass a written test and, other than students who are in the military, demonstrate firearms handling skills. DFW also offers a home study option.

Hunter education courses are taught by volunteers, either individually or as a team, that are trained and certified by DFW. All instructors must be at least 21 years of age, and must undergo a background investigation by DFW.

An exemption from the hunter education requirement is available in the form of a one-year deferral once in a lifetime to hunt without completing the training course, as long as they are doing so in the company of a hunter over the age of 18 who has been licensed for the prior three years.

Minimum Hunting Ages. Prior to 1994, all hunters under the age of 14 must have been accompanied by a parent, guardian, safety instructor, or other approved adult when they were in possession of a firearm for the purposes of hunting or target practice. Currently, there is

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no minimum age requirement for a hunting license or for enrollment in a hunter education course.

Summary of Bill: The Hunter Education Program Statute is Modified. Beginning August 1, 2013, DFW may charge a registration fee of up to \$20 for a hunter education training course and up to \$10 for a duplicate hunter education certificate. The fee must be collected consistent with federal regulations for revenue associated with a federal grant, due to the fact that hunter education program funding is largely federal. Additionally, the Fish & Wildlife Commission must adopt rules regarding the use of this revenue.

The bill makes several other changes including:

- changing the term sportsmanship to ethical hunting behavior as it relates to hunter education course content;
- specifying that a military service person must be a resident of, or stationed in, Washington to be exempt from the firearm skills portion of hunter education; and
- removing the requirement that the licensed hunter accompanying a hunter education deferred hunter have held a license for the prior three years.

Minimum Hunting Ages are Provided. No one under the age of eight is eligible to take a hunter education course or purchase a hunting license.

Additionally, all hunters under the age of 14 must be accompanied by a licensed hunter age 18 years or older unless the youth is hunting on private property owned or leased by an immediate family member. A violation of this requirement is a misdemeanor.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

[OFM requested ten-year cost projection pursuant to I-960.]

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 would provide more accountability for the funds that are accumulated from the hunter education classes. It would also allow for volunteer instructors to be compensated for out-of-pocket expenses accrued. The minimum age requirement has been included in statute in the past and is a good addition to the law.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Bruce Bjork, DFW; Carl Klein, DFW.