

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1353

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to commissioning an elk management pilot project that focuses initially on the Colockum elk herd.

Brief Description: Commissioning an elk management pilot project that focuses initially on the Colockum elk herd.

Sponsors: House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Representatives Dent, Blake, Buys and Hayes).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/25/17, 2/1/17 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/20/17, 96-1.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 4/6/17, 48-1.

House Concurred.

Passed House: 4/18/17, 96-0.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to conduct an elk management pilot project within the range of the Colockum elk herd to reduce elk highway collisions and to reduce crop damage.
- Requires that the pilot project include certain direct wildlife management efforts, including: increased use of hunting opportunities; a prohibition on the feeding of elk within the pilot project area; and, the use of managed livestock grazing.
- Directs the WDFW to invite the Yakama Nation to participate in all aspects of the pilot project.
- Directs the WDFW and the WSDOT to report the results of the pilot project to the Legislature by October 31, 2020.

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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Chapman, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Fitzgibbon, Lytton, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Robinson, Springer, Stanford and J. Walsh.

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is composed of nine individuals appointed by the Governor. The Commission is charged with the duty of preserving, protecting, perpetuating, and managing the state's wildlife. Specifically, the Commission is charged with setting basic goals for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to implement, and reviewing the performance of the WDFW in implementing the policies established by the Commission.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The WDFW manages and protects the state's fish and wildlife resources under the direction of the Commission. The WDFW also monitors wildlife that threaten human safety or cause property damage.

The WDFW Game Management Plan.

The WDFW maintains, and regularly updates, a game management plan for the various game species in Washington. The purpose of the plan, according to the WDFW, is to guide the WDFW in the management of hunted wildlife in six-year time frames. The declared focus of the plan is the scientific management of game populations, harvest management, and other significant factors affecting game populations. The overall goals are: protecting, sustaining, and managing hunted wildlife; providing stable, regulated recreational hunting opportunities; protecting and enhancing wildlife habitat; and minimizing adverse impacts to residents, other wildlife, and the environment.

The WDFW Colockum Herd Plan.

One component of the game management plan is a herd plan for each of the state's 10 elk herds. The Colockum elk herd is currently being managed under a 2006 herd management plan. The plan's three primary goals are: (1) to manage the elk and their habitat to ensure healthy, productive populations; (2) to manage the elk for a variety of recreational, educational, and cultural uses; and (3) to manage the elk herd for a sustainable yield.

Deer and Elk Collision Impacts.

According to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), more than 1100 deer and elk collisions with motor vehicles are reported to the Washington State Patrol (WSP) annually. The WSDOT removes an average of nearly 3500 deer and elk carcasses each year. Collisions between wildlife and motor vehicles result in an average of 1190 human injuries and two fatalities per year in Washington.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this specific purpose, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) must conduct an elk management pilot project to evaluate wildlife management actions to reduce elk highway collisions and to reduce elk damage to crops. The pilot project must focus initially on lands within the range of the Colockum herd. The WDFW must invite the Yakama Nation to participate in all aspects of the project.

The WDFW must work with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to evaluate wildlife management actions to reduce elk highway collisions.

The pilot project must include direct wildlife management efforts, including:

- the increased use of special depredation hunts and general hunting opportunities of the Colockum herd;
- a prohibition on the feeding of elk within the pilot project area by persons other than WDFW personnel; and
- the use of managed livestock grazing to attract elk away from roads and private property.

The WDFW and the WSDOT must report the results of the pilot project to the Legislature by October 31, 2020. The report must address how the information gained from the pilot project will be used to manage the Colockum herd and other similarly situated elk herds.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Department of Fish and Wildlife employees have worked very hard to mitigate elk problems using existing tools. The Department of Fish and Wildlife has been working on solutions with the Washington State Department of Transportation. The bill would give the Department of Fish and Wildlife room to look at additional management options.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The Yakama Nation has a reserved treaty right to hunt elk. The Yakama Nation would like to assist in participating in the pilot project.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Dent, prime sponsor; Cindy Alia, Citizens' Alliance for Property Rights; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau and Washington Cattlemen's Association; and Anis Aoude, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Dawn Vyvyan, Yakama Nation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.