

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1353

As of March 9, 2017

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

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 3/09/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates an elk management pilot program to manage the Colockum Elk Herd and draw elk away from roads and private property.
- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and Department of Transportation (DOT) to submit a report to the Legislature by October 31, 2020.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Kelsey Morfitt (786-7407)

Background: DFW Authority. DFW manages and protects the state's fish and wildlife resources. DFW also monitors wildlife that cause property damage or threaten human safety.

DOT Authority. Statute requires DOT to create a statewide transportation plan with public input, and coordinate state and federal transportation policy and funding implementation. DOT also tracks elk-motor vehicle collisions in the state and installs wildlife warning signs in high crossing areas.

Crop Reimbursement for Wildlife Damage. Current law provides a method for reimbursing the public for damage caused to crops or other property by state wildlife. Citizens may seek \$500 to \$10,000 in reimbursement for property damage caused by wildlife.

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.

Deer and Elk Collision Impacts. Deer and elk collisions result in an average of 1190 human injuries and two fatalities per year in the state. The highest number of elk-vehicle collisions in Eastern Washington is on Interstate 90 near Easton and Cle Elum in Kittitas County.

The Colockum Herd Plan. DFW manages the Colockum Elk Herd, under the 2006 Washington State Herd Management Plan (Plan). The overarching goals of the Plan are to manage the herd: (1) to preserve and protect elk and their habitats; (2) for a variety of recreational, educational, and aesthetic purposes including hunting, scientific study, cultural and ceremonial uses by Native Americans, wildlife viewing, and photography; and (3) for a sustainable yield.

Another goal of the Plan is to keep the population within 5 percent of 4500 elk. The Colockum Elk Herd, which roams in Kittitas and Chelan counties, grew from about 3300 elk in 2007 to over 5700 elk in 2013.

Over the past two years, the elk herd's population declined. In 2015, there were about 6100 elk in the Colockum Herd, about 5100 elk in 2016, and approximately 4500 elk or less currently.

Summary of Bill: DFW and DOT must conduct an elk management pilot program for the Colockum Elk Herd in Central Washington. The pilot program must include:

- additional special depredation hunts and general hunting opportunities, capped at 300 elk per year;
- a permit system for those wanting to feed elk; and
- the use of managed livestock grazing to draw elk away from roads and private property.

By October 31, 2020, DFW and DOT must submit a report to the Legislature on the results of the pilot program, and how the Colockum Elk Herd and similar elk herds will be managed going forward. The pilot program expires July 1, 2021.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Colockum Elk Herd is overpopulated, and highway safety and damage to property owners are the top two concerns. This bill should be amended regarding feeding permits, tribal co-management, and landowner agreements.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Tom Dent, Prime Sponsor; Anis Aoude, Dept. of Fish & Wildlife; Tom Davis, WA Farm Bureau; Dawn Vyvyan, Yakama Nation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.