
**Rural Development, Agriculture, &
Natural Resources Committee**

SSB 5525

Brief Description: Concerning whitetail deer population estimates.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senator Short).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to conduct specific whitetail deer population assessments in northeast Washington.
- Requires the DFW to make hunter harvest data available prior to establishing hunting seasons.

Hearing Date: 3/20/19

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is responsible for managing the state's fish and wildlife resources, and establishes basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife. Game species are managed according to a multi-year game management plan. For whitetail deer, the DFW has developed a management plan to:

- maintain and sustain white-tailed deer populations using sound, objective science to inform decision-making;
- provide stable, regulated recreational deer hunting opportunity to all citizens; and
- manage white-tailed deer populations within the limits of suitable habitat.

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.

The current game management plan for whitetail deer identifies six Whitetail Deer Management Zones (Zones). Each Zone contains several game management units (GMU) identified with a number, and each GMU contains several transects identified by geographic location.

Summary of Bill:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) must manage whitetail deer populations in northeast Washington with the goal of increasing the deer counted per mile in the late summer surveys to fall within the range of eight to nine deer counted per survey mile.

Beginning with the 2019 population assessment, the DFW must conduct a minimum of six traditional transect counts. The transect counts must track and report buck-to-doe ratios and fawn-to-doe ratios, and demonstrate whitetail deer density and trends.

The DFW must conduct the first set of transect counts in August, and the second set in September. The DFW must make compliant hunter harvest data available to the public 14 days after the January 31 deadline for hunters to report their harvest to the DFW. In addition, the DFW must make noncompliant hunter harvest data available no later than 30 days prior to a commission meeting to establish hunting seasons. The data must include a description of the assumptions and methodology used for determining noncompliant hunter harvest data.

The DFW must recalculate the estimate of noncompliant hunter harvest data for 2015 through 2019 using the methodology used in 2013 and 2014, and report the results to the Legislature and the Fish and Wildlife Commission by December 31, 2019.

The DFW must convene two annual meetings with stakeholders to discuss transect counts and the findings and outcomes from those counts. In addition, the DFW should seek opportunities to integrate local knowledge and expertise into its work on wildlife management and hunting seasons.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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