

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1983

As of February 24, 2020

Title: An act relating to natural resource management activities.

Brief Description: Concerning natural resource management activities.

Sponsors: Representatives Maycumber, Kretz and Walsh.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/12/20, 91-6.

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 2/20/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to use the best available land management techniques to manage acquired lands, and requires DFW to develop mitigation actions where appropriate.
- Allows DFW to use specific land management techniques without preparing an environmental impact statement.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: DFW may acquire and manage state lands as part of its mandate to protect and preserve the state's fish and wildlife resources while providing sustainable recreational and commercial opportunities. DFW currently owns or manages about 1 million acres in 33 wildlife areas, along with 700 public water-access sites.

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) establishes a review process for state and local governments to evaluate environmental impacts from project permits and other government decisions. The SEPA process involves the completion of an environmental checklist by a lead agency and coordination with other governments and agencies as applicable. Some projects may require the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). Information collected during the SEPA process may be used to adjust project proposals to reduce potential environmental impacts. Certain actions are exempt from the SEPA requirements to submit an environmental checklist or to prepare an EIS.

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.

Summary of Bill: DFW may manage its acquired lands using the best available land management techniques. These techniques include:

- licenses or approvals to move firewood or for brush picking;
- periodic application of Department of Agriculture-approved chemicals by licensed personnel;
- issuance of right-of-way easements and use permits to use existing roads in nonresidential areas; and
- issuance of grazing leases, regardless of whether the land has been actively grazed.

Land management activities under this authority are exempt from the requirement to prepare an EIS under the SEPA, and DFW has a duty to develop mitigation actions where appropriate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 2020.

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: There have been a significant number of fires in the Loomis, and in areas where agencies have done proper maintenance, including allowing grazing and removing fuel, compared to areas that were not treated, the habitat survived. With proper maintenance on a small scale natural habitats can be saved. Lands need to be properly managed for the benefit of future generations to enjoy.

OTHER: Most management techniques described in the bill are currently exempt from SEPA. WDFW manages over 50 grazing permits to manage vegetation to benefit wildlife and waterfowl. WDFW would use its grazing evaluation framework to analyze environmental impacts of any potential new grazing actions and develop appropriate mitigation where needed.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Jacquelin Maycumber, Prime Sponsor.

OTHER: Paul Dahmer, Department of Fish and Wildlife.

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